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CHAPTERS

ON

EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE.

CHAPTERS

ON

EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BY

J. H. HIPPISLEY, Esq. M.A.

"Not for the lerid bot for the lewed."

PROLOGUE TO BRUNNE'S TRANSLATION OF PIERS LANGTOFT.

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INTRODUCTION.

It is felt by the writer of the following chapters, that some apology may be required for a publication on subjects which have engaged the attention of many able authors, as well of the present, as of the preceding age. The choice of so beaten a track, necessarily implies one of two intentions; either that of supplying the deficiencies of previous writers, or that of selecting from well-known works, such matter as may lead the minds of those who have less leisure than inclination for the study of literary history, to a consideration of some of the more material topics which the pursuit may offer to them. This little work, undertaken with the latter object only, necessarily assumes, in some

measure, the character of a compilation from easily accessible volumes. In such a case, it is clear that no pretension to literary merit can exist; and the only excuse for the publication of the present volume, must consist in apparent, or possible, utility. The well-informed reader, who has already been abundantly supplied with works of professed antiquaries, scholars, or critics, will discover in the following pages little either of novelty or interest. It is, therefore, the author's desire, that these pages should be received, not as intended for the scholar, or the man of letters, but as originating from a belief that some elementary knowledge on early English literature might be imparted to the young and unpractised student, in a more compendious form than has hitherto been adopted.

The advantages of literary history, as a branch of education, have scarcely been sufficiently appreciated. The improvement to be derived from such a study is two-fold: on the one hand, the

taste and imagination are cultivated by selections from authors otherwise prolix, or occasionally even impure; on the other, the mind of the reader is awakened to one, at least, of the most important branches of history—the moral and intellectual history of mankind. In the pursuit of this latter subject of inquiry, the most trivial, as well as the most sublime, authors, have their value; and brief accounts, or short abstracts, are often equivalent to the study of entire volumes. Sometimes, the intellectual character of a particular period is to be collected from the nature and subject matter of the works themselves; in other instances, those very works undesignedly occupy the province of history, and exhibit to us a curious portraiture of contemporary manners: and in this view the mediæval poets of Europe are especially valuable. In point of originality, and as gifted with an apparently intuitive perception of the just and the sublime, the poets of ancient Greece stand preëminent

above those of all other ages and countries, as do their Roman imitators in delicacy of sentiment, and in elegance of style. But as affording illustrations of the mind of their day, a mind almost entirely distinct from that of the ancient classic ages, the vernacular and mediæval poets of Europe rank next, at least, in importance, if they are not altogether equal, to those of Ionia, Athens, or Sicily.

In this kind of historical interest our own early literature is peculiarly rich and fertile; and, owing to the attention which men of fortune, as well as of high literary attainment, have long bestowed upon this subject, metrical romances, satirical tracts, old plays, and the works of old prose-writers as well as poets, have been selected from the manuscripts or scarce volumes of our great national libraries, and placed, in the form of accurately edited and neatly printed publications, within the reach of all who possess collections of

books. These afford an engaging study, not merely to the professed antiquary, but to all readers who take an interest in the most essential points of general history: but were we called upon to select, from a great variety, one single author, who, independently of the literary charms with which his works abound, affords also an exact and finished portraiture of contemporary manners and opinions, our choice would necessarily fall upon Chaucer. It has been justly observed that the "Commedia" of Dante supplies a valuable commentary on the history of his times. To the lovers of political history, the Italian poet is indeed full of interest, as exhibiting to view, and as placing before them in action, the most conspicuous characters of his age; but those who are studious rather of what concerns the moral and intellectual condition of mankind, will derive a yet more ample fund of instruction from the works of Chaucer. Dante paints individuals; Chaucer,

if we combine his minor poems with his great work, an entire nation.

The only substantial objection to the study of the entire works of Chaucer, consists in the gross and offensive indelicacy with which some few of his most humorous and descriptive poems are occasionally stained. The obsoleteness of his language (the difficulties of which are far greater in the Canterbury Tales than in the minor poems, or the prose-writings) is no more than what a moderate share of attention, with the invaluable aid of Tyrwhitt's notes and glossary, will suffice to overcome. On the score of obscenity, all that can be urged is, that, with the exception of some passages of the Miller's, the Reve's, and the Merchant's Tales, this insurmountable objection occurs but rarely. The minor poems, and the serious tales of the Canterbury Pilgrims, are altogether free from it; and the Nonne's Priest's Tale, perhaps on the whole Chaucer's masterpiece, as a humorous poem, does

not contain more than one or two exceptionable expressions. Next to this principal defect of Chaucer's poetry (a defect rather of the age, than of the author), will be reckoned the prolixity which he occasionally shares in common with almost all our earlier writers. In anticipation of objections of this kind, a few specimens of the poet have been appended to this volume, which although familiar to every scholar, may perhaps prove acceptable to the general admirer of English literature. In the Essays, the object, as regards Chaucer, has been partly to point out the position which he occupies in the history of our literature, by comparing him with preceding or contemporary authors; partly to exemplify his literary merits; but chiefly to bring the reader in contact with such of his passages, whether prose or poetical, as illustrate either his own life and character, or the manners, opinions, and literary taste of his age. With such a purpose in view, the practice of ex-

hibiting an author piecemeal, and in short extracts, which in criticism and literary history is sometimes a necessary, though often a very inadequate, mode of proceeding, may perhaps be excusable.

In the two concluding chapters, an attempt has been made to review the principal points of our early literature, from the age of Chaucer to the close of Shakspeare's life; shortly after which period, the ascendancy of puritanical tastes and habits, and the distraction of the civil wars, breaking up and extinguishing the previous modes of thinking and of writing, caused the literature of after ages to assume an entirely new face and aspect. To readers new to such subjects, these essays may perhaps suggest some interesting points of inquiry, which, from the very brevity of the present undertaking, have been but cursorily touched upon in these chapters. It cannot, indeed, be too strongly impressed upon the young student,

that the whole volume is to be considered merely as introductory, and as supplying the outline of a subject, many points of which have been ably, though in some cases perhaps diffusely, illustrated in more important works. Should the writer have been inclined to differ (generally speaking, on very minor and trivial points) from the established authorities by which he has been most materially assisted, it is hoped that such occasional and trifling differences will rather be received as a proof of the attention which he has paid to the works, than of any disrespect he may thereby be supposed to entertain for the authors.

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CHAPTERS

ON

EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE.

CHAPTER 1.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PREVIOUS TO CHAUCER—CHARACTER OF CHAUCER'S EARLIER POEMS —LITERARY TASTE DURING THE REIGN OF EDWARD THE THIRD.

General principles in the history of language.

THE language of literature differs, in all ages, from the oral discourse of the uneducated. Beyond the circle of those who read, there is always a class, large in proportion to the rudeness of the time*, whose language, from not being fixed or regulated by any general standard, is broken into dialects. These dialects, as the range of letters

* Trevisa, writing in the middle of the fourteenth century, divided the dialects of England into three principal branches—northern, middle, and southern.—Burnett's Specimens, vol. i. 39.

widens, are concentrated, and rendered uniform, by the language of books. Thus, a fixed standard for the common discourse of a nation, is both formed and diffused by the means of literature.

In inquiring, therefore, into the origin and progress of any language, it is to literature, as to the master-source and controller of a national tongue, that the attention should be directed. Yet, plain as this subject appears to be, one of the most popular and able writers* on the early history of the English tongue, has represented the change, (as it is usually called) from Saxon to English, as taking place, rather from an oral communication between the Saxons and Normans, than from the gradual introduction into the Saxon literature of the French syntax and derivatives.

The influence, indeed, of oral communication in the formation of compound languages, has been usually overrated. The effect of conquest, or of colonization, has been to substitute one dialect for another, by the destruction, or expulsion, of the great mass of the original inhabitants; or if these latter have continued to form the bulk of the population, the conquerors, from being compara-

* Ellis's Specimens, vol. i. p. 77.

tively few in numbers, have adopted the language of the vanquished. Thus, when the Romans settled in the Celtic provinces of Europe, entirely occupying the towns, and driving the natives into the thinly inhabited country, they substituted for the old Celtic, not, indeed, as Gibbon states, the language with little variation * of Virgil and Cicero; but a colloquial jargon, afterwards distinguished from the Latin classic† idiom, and also from the Teutonic dialects, by the title of the Romana rustica. When the Teutonic tribes afterwards settled in these countries, they conformed, from the comparative smallness of their numbers‡, to this prevailing dialect. In England, on the contrary, the Saxons, taking possession, through repeated invasions, of the greater part of the island, and driving the old inhabitants into the mountainous and poorer districts, introduced, with an entire new race, an entirely new language.

* Gibbon's Decline and Fall, vol. i. p. 60, oct.

† Hallam, Introduct. to Lit., vol. i. pp. 27 and 31.

‡ Perhaps, also, from the comparative rudeness of their language. Co-existing with colloquial Latin in the Celtic provinces of Gaul and Spain, was a Latin literature, which must have tended to render the speech of the most educated classes more uniform than that of the Teutonic invaders.

The Normans, in all their expeditions, adopted the language of the conquered: in Neustria, in Sicily, and lastly in England. In the latter instance only, do we possess documents showing the degree in which the previously established language was influenced by that of the new settlers, prior to the adoption of it as a national tongue.

Another general principle in the history of languages, is, that there are no precise epochs or dates at which the changes may be said to take place. If there are any eras in the history of languages, it is with reference to the causes of changes, and not with reference to the changes themselves. In this point of view, the age of Chaucer is an important era. Chaucer was a diligent student of the French, Italian, and Latin, and in translating from them, transferred many words of Latin origin into his native tongue. The popularity of his works, as well as those of Gower, went far, perhaps, towards effecting the innovations in English, which Caxton * observes to have taken place previous to his own day.

The language.

But, although neither the origin, nor the subsequent progress of English, can be assigned to any

* Burnett's Specimens, vol. i. 48.

specified dates; yet for the sake of perspicuity we may (as in the case of general history) establish arbitrary and conventional divisions. Thus we say, generally speaking, that about 1150 may be dated the decline of pure Saxon—about 1250 the commencement of English—and that the century between these two dates was occupied by a kind of semi-Saxon language.

In the course of these periods, the language of the Saxon population gradually underwent, 1st, a change in the nature of its construction and syntax; 2ndly, an infusion of a certain proportion of French derivatives. Both these changes were caused, by the study of, and translation from, the French language and literature, during the early Norman reigns.

Saxon, in syntax and grammar, resembles the modern German. The order of the sentence appears to our conceptions inverted; and the inflexions of the cases extend even to the articles. One of the earliest steps in the progress of English out of Saxon, consists in the substitution of a more simple for a more involved order in the sentences, in a disuse of the inflexions of the nouns, and (with the exception of the past tense)

of the few Saxon conjugations of the verbs, and in a discontinuance of the elliptical mode of expression common in Saxon poetry.

This change in syntax and grammar, is sometimes observable, even while the words continued chiefly, if not altogether, Saxon*.

About the reign of John, the use of English† words becomes general‡; and at length in the reign of Edward the First, we have extant, a metrical composition, which, although written in a language very different from that in use in subsequent ages, may yet be called English. Such is the metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, which, since it alludes to the canonization of St. Louis§, must be placed after the year 1297. This

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* Turner's History of England, vol. v. 368.

† By English words may be understood anglicized expressions, either of Norman or Saxon origin.

‡ The semi-Saxon composition, by Layamon, consisting of a translation of the French Chronicle of Wace, is of rather uncertain date; but, in all probability, it belongs to the reign of John. It is certainly posterior to 1155, since that is the date of the original. Turner places it about 1200. A long extract from it may be found in Ellis's Specimens, vol. i. p. 60. The "Ormulum," a paraphrase of the Gospels, probably belongs to the same date.—Tyrwhitt's Essay, p. 40, note, quarto edit. So also a "Treatise on the Passion of St. Margaret."—Turner's England, vol. v. 369.

§ "After King Lowis (Lewis the Eighth) com his *holi* son Lowis."—Hearne's Robert of Gloucester, vol. ii. p. 522.

chronicle, which deduces the history of England from the fabulous landing of Brute, the Trojan, to the battle of Lewes, in the reign of Henry the Third, is, with the exception of the concluding events, chiefly translated from the Latin prose of Geoffrey of Monmouth: but it is also occasionally topographical, and as such, was used by Selden in his notes to Drayton's Polyolbion. The progress which the English language had made, between the age of Robert of Gloucester and that of Chaucer, may be exemplified by the following few lines, describing the answer of Cordelia to Lear:—

" Sire," heo seyde, " Y leve not that my sustier al soth seide,
As for me meself, ich woll soth segge of this dede,
Ich the love, as the mon that my fader ys:
And ever habbe y loved as my fader, and ever wole y wys.
* And gef thou wolt get thereuppe more asche & wyte of me;
Al the ende of love, and the ground, ich woll segge the.
As muche as thou hast, as muche thou art worth y wys,
And so muche ich love the. The ende of love ys this †."

The comparative polish which English received between the days of Gloucester and of Chaucer, was brought about, in a great measure, by the

* And if thou wilt yet thereupon more ask and know of me.
† Hearne's edit. vol. i. p. 30.

increased use of our tongue in literature. But before the time of Chaucer, English literature was confined to the labours* of recluse monks who had received their education at provincial convents, as Layamon, at Ernleye on Severn, Gloucester, at the town from which he derives his name: their metrical compositions, with the exception perhaps of the romances, being designed for the middle classes of society†. Chaucer first brought English literature in contact with the court and the world, by employing his powers on courtly and chivalric subjects. It was, also, in the reign of Edward the Third, that English became the language, though not perhaps of the court, or of public documents, yet at least that of public pleading, and of the higher classes of society.

A slight review of the causes of the rise and decline of the French language and literature in

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* This certainly applies to the metrical chronicles, lives of saints, and religious poems. The metrical romances are generally anonymous; but few, if any, can be proved to be the works of laymen; and Warton's opinion (vol. i. p. 91) is decidedly that they were translated by monks.

† They are usually addressed, as in the cases of Brunne's Chronicle and Hampole's Pricke of Conscience, to those who are acquainted only with English. The term "lordynges," used by Brunne, in his address to his readers, seems to answer to "sirs." It is addressed by the Sompnour of the Canterbury Pilgrimage to the whole cavalcade.

England may, perhaps, assist the comprehension of this subject,

The foundation of Norman influence in England was laid in the reign of Edward the Confessor, who, having passed his youth, and having received his education, at the court of his uncle Duke Richard, returned to his native country with a train of Norman favourites. This Norman faction was opposed by the Saxons under Earl Godwin; but the battle of Hastings put an end to the struggle, and the French ascendancy became complete. The highest posts, as well as the richest lands of the nation, passed into Norman hands; all public proceedings were carried on (when not in Latin) in French: the poetry of the Norman minstrels was preferred before that of the Saxons; and the Saxon tongue, banished from the court and from the world, became the language merely of the lower classes of society. The Saxons therefore, in order to qualify themselves for intercourse with their Norman superiors, or for any public duties to which they might chance to be admitted, engaged in French as a part of school education. At the conventual and other grammar-schools,

boys were taught to translate Latin into French, a practice which Ingulphus attributes to a command from the Conqueror; but which was, at all events, in existence not long after the conquest. Afterwards, at the university, the study of French still continued as a part of the exercises of youth; and the statutes* of Oriel College in particular, as late as the reign of Edward the Second, enjoin conversation in that language.

Before the time of Becket the see of Canterbury had been, during the Norman reigns, occupied exclusively by foreigners. Lanfranc, and Anselm, though not Normans by birth, came immediately from the monastery of Bec, in Normandy, over which they had presided. In the appointment of Becket, we perceive an early indication of the revival of Saxon influence. It is possible even that English literature, engrossed as it was by the clergy, may have received some encouragement from a Saxon archbishop. But whatever effect Becket may have had upon our literature, it must have been transitory. In the reign succeeding that of Henry the Second, Norman minstrels were raised to a high pitch of favour

* Hallam's Introduct. vol. i. 63.

by a minstrel-king; and the loss of Normandy, in the reign of John, although it may have laid the foundation, in some measure, of an increased patronage of English, does not appear to have produced any immediate effects.—Robert of Gloucester, writing rather before the year 1300, bears testimony to the still prevalent use of French among the higher classes. But the practice of translating French metrical romances into English, which began very shortly after that date, proves that the English language was then beginning to claim an interest with classes above the general mass.

In the reign of Edward the Third, the fate of French, as a national language, was sealed. Soon after the great plague* in 1348, the practice of translating into French was discontinued by schoolmasters; first by one Sir John Cornwall, and afterwards generally. By a statute of 1362, all pleas in courts of justice are directed to be carried on in English. The language alone of statutes†, and the records of parliament, continued to be French, and this (although there is

* Called by Trevisa the "great deth."—Burnett, vol. i. p. 40.

† Hallam's Introduct. vol. i. 64.

one English instrument bearing the date of 1343) up to about the accession of Edward the Fourth.

If the works of Chaucer, as laying the foundation of a change, may be regarded as an epoch in the history of our language, their effect, as regards the character and history of our literature, is at once more marked and more immediate. This will clearly appear from a review of the English literature, which preceded the earliest works of our poet.

The literature.

English metrical compositions, previous to the earliest* poems of Chaucer, may be classed generally under four heads—Romances, Chronicles, Lives of Saints, and other moral or religious poems, either illustrated by tales, or mystified by allegories. A little later than Robert, the monk

* In all probability the earliest poems of Chaucer were, the "Translation of the Roman de la Rose," the "Court of Love," the "Troilus and Cresseide," the "Dutchesse," and other poems, apparently relating to the courtship or marriages of John of Gaunt. The Canterbury Tales were never finished, and were certainly not brought to their present state till after the year 1381, since, in the Nonne's Priest's Tale, allusion is made to Jack Straw's rebellion. On the whole, it will not perhaps appear very unreasonable to suppose all the principal minor poems of Chaucer, with the exception of the "Legende of Good Women," in which most of them are cited, as prior to his great work; but this is incapable of absolute proof.

of Gloucester above-mentioned, appears Robert Mannyng, a monk of Brunne or Bourne, in Lincolnshire. His principal performance consists of a metrical translation of a French chronicle by Piers Langtoft*; but he is also known as the translator of, perhaps, a more interesting work, the Manuel des Pêches of Bishop Grosthed. The plan of this poem, which is entitled "The Handlyng of Sinne," consists in the illustration of different virtues and vices by tales †; and thus, in part at least, it forms a prototype of the great English work of Gower, the Confessio Amantis. Indeed, as a collection of tales, it may be considered a curious and very early specimen of that kind of composition. The language and versification of Brunne is less rude than that of Robert of Gloucester; but as a metrical author he is equally prosaic, and devoid of all approach to the spirit of poetry; a defect which appears the more glaring in these two writers, as they touch on subjects

* A canon of Bridlington, in Yorkshire, of Norman origin. He wrote a rhyming chronicle of English history, down to the end of the reign of Edward the First. Robert de Brunne follows him only in the later part of his history, the earlier portion of it being taken from Wace.

† Ample specimens of these tales may be found in Mr. Turner's History of England, vol. v. p. 219.

which have since been rendered classical by genius; such as the history of Arthur and Merlin, and that of Lear. We should, however, remember, that the chronicles of these two authors were intended rather as *history* than poetry; and that they appear in metre chiefly for the sake of being more easily recited or sung*.

To Brunne succeeds Adam Davie, Marshall of Stratford-atte-Bowe. His works are all of a religious character, consisting of—1. Visions. 2. The Battle of Jerusalem. 3. The Legend of St. Alexius. 4. Scripture Histories. 5. "Of Fifteen Tokens before the Day of Judgment." 6. Lamentations of Souls. The Life of Alexander, a more spirited production than any of the preceding, cannot be pronounced a genuine work of Davie's.

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* Mr. Campbell (Essay on English Poetry, p. 44) observes, that, "although Brunne declared that his poem was intended neither for 'seggers' (reciters) nor for 'harpours,' yet that it is clear, from another passage, that he intended his Chronicle to be sung, at least by parts, at public festivals." That this was a common practice as late as the days of Chaucer, is shown by one of the concluding lines of his "Troilus and Cresseide," which declares that the poem was to be "redde or elles sung." So also in the Frankleine's Prologue, the poet describes a practice not altogether disused in his own day:—

> With hir instruments they songe,
> Or elles reden hem for hir plesance."

In the reign of Edward the Third, the earliest versifier is Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole, the translator of a Latin work, entitled, Stimulus Conscientiæ, generally attributed to Robert Grosthed, Bishop of Lincoln. The English title of the translation is The Pricke of Conscience. It is divided into seven parts*:—1. Of Man's Nature. 2. Of the World. 3. Of Death. 4. Of Purgatory. 5. Of the Day of Judgment. 6. Of the Torments of Hell. 7. Of the Joys of Heaven. This poem is especially addressed to those who can only read English.

The English translations from the French metrical romances were very numerous in the reign of Edward the Second, and continued as late as that of Henry the Seventh. "Sir Tristrem," one of the earliest (being assigned† to the reign of Edward the First), and the "Squier of Low Degree," one of the latest, are by some thought

Earliest original English poets.

* Chaucer thus describes the *Somnium Scipionis*:—

Chapiters seven it had, of heaven and of hell,
And earth, and soules that therein dwell.
Parliament of Fowles.

It would seem that Hampole had lately studied this popular Latin work.

† See the edition of Sir Walter Scott, who attributes this romance to Thomas of Ercildoun.

original, since their French prototypes, if they exist, have at least not been discovered.

But since the antiquity, as also the originality, of Sir Tristrem is somewhat doubtful, the praise of being the earliest original English poet has been claimed for Lawrence Minot, the author of some short poems, or rather ballads, on the victories of the reign of Edward the Third. They begin with the battle of Halidown Hill, and end with the siege of Guisnes Castle: and as the last of these metrical effusions seems to have been written shortly after the event described, it is presumed, that the compositions of Minot date previous to the year 1352. Ritson, the editor of Minot, praises his author for the ease, variety, and harmony of his versification, in which qualities he declares him to have no equals, previous to the sixteenth century, except Robert of Brunne and Tusser. As a poet Minot is certainly equal to these two writers, though perhaps not much superior. In one respect, however, he is entitled to some praise; he is the first English versifier who quits the beaten track of translation from chronicle, romance, and theology. As regards choice of subject he may

be classed with his northern contemporary* Barbour, though, in every other respect, he is far inferior to the Scottish Homer.

From this review of English metrical compositions previous to Chaucer, it will appear—first, that they were, with scarcely any acknowledged exceptions, the works of recluse and cloistered† monks; secondly, that they were, for the most part, designed for the great mass of the people, as distinguished from the learned clerk on the one hand, and the courtly knight on the other. In both these respects, the early works of Chaucer may be regarded as forming an important era in our literature. Chaucer, if not the first, was certainly among the very first English poets who were laymen; and the themes on which he engaged his youthful muse, fantastical as they appear in the present day, were in his age subjects

* Barbour, the author of a considerable and well-known epic or historical poem, on the Life and Exploits of Robert Bruce, was, in 1357, archdeacon of Aberdeen, and may therefore be, with tolerable exactness, classed as contemporary with Minot. The date of Barbour's birth is unknown.

† Even Minot is conjectured to be a monk. The style of his poetry would rather class him with those attendant on the expeditions of princes, described by Warton, as rhymers on recent events.—Eng. Poets, vol. ii. 154.

of serious interest and attention to the courtier and to the man of the world. In order to illustrate this point more clearly, and to show how completely Chaucer stands aloof, not only from preceding poets, but even from those of his own day, in the choice of these subjects, as well as in his manner of treating them, it will be necessary to offer some slight notice of two of the most remarkable productions of his age; by one of which the early poems of our author were immediately preceded, as they were immediately followed, by the other. The two works to which I allude, are, the Vision of William, usually, though erroneously, called the Vision of Pierce Ploughman, and the Confessio Amantis of Gower.

These two works, widely different from each other, in plan, subject, and execution, cannot, in any of these* respects, be classed with the earlier poems of Chaucer. The "Vision" is usually, though on no very certain grounds, attributed to Robert Langlande, a secular priest, and a Fellow

The Vision of William.

* This is not strictly true of the "Confessio Amantis," since that poem turns upon the subject of love. The grand distinction between this work and all the poetry of Chaucer is, as will be more distinctly pointed out in the sequel, that the object of Gower's only English poem is *moral*.

of Oriel College in Oxford. But whoever may have been the author, the work is altogether, as well from its alliterative metre*, and the homeliness of its diction, as from the choice of its principal subjects, a popular work, and designed for the unlearned and uncourtly part of the nation. It is an allegorical satire, directed chiefly against Catholic vices and superstitions; but also generally against the vices and follies of the age. The subject is introduced under the form of a vision, or dream; a very common mode of composition with the English poets of this, and with the Scotch poets of the succeeding, age.

The origin of this plan may, with great probability, be attributed to the frequent study of the Somnium Scipionis of Cicero, with its accompanying Commentary and Dissertation on Dreams, by Macrobius. This work was constantly in the hands of Chaucer: it is often alluded to by him in the introductory lines of his poems; and in the Parliament of Fowles a short analysis of it is given. The Roman de la Rose, trans-

* It appears from a passage in what is usually called Chaucer's Retractation, appended to the Persoune's Tale, that alliterative metre was peculiar to the northern part of the kingdom.—See Tyrwhitt's note on the passage.

lated by Chaucer, is a vision, introduced by an allusion to the Somnium Scipionis and to Macrobius; and it is possible that the attention of our poet may have been first directed to the Latin work from this circumstance; at least the allusion to it in the introductions to his poems, is in imitation of the Roman de la Rose, the influence of which production upon literature, however extravagant this poem may now appear to us, was very great in the age preceding that of Chaucer. It is worthy of remark, that the translation of this long poem, which engaged Chaucer's youthful days, seems to have given a direction to his later compositions. Allegorical description, devotion to love, satire on women, and satire on the clergy, form at once the leading topics of the "Rose," and of Chaucer's original poetical works. As regards the prevalence of the form of the vision in poetry, the popularity of the French poem may be considered as amongst the leading causes of this general practice. Dante, who was born shortly after* the composition of the earlier portion of the "Rose," is one of the

* Dante was born in 1260. This, according to Warton, is the date of William de Lorris's death; but Godwin (Life of Chaucer, vol. ii. 239, oct. edit.) argues, with great probability, that Lorris's death took place before 1235.

first to follow in the track. In Italy, the "Rose" continued a favourite work till the days of Petrarch, who professed to despise it*.

The object of the plan of a vision seems to be to give probability to supernatural scenes and characters, which could not reasonably have been supposed to appear to the poet while in a waking state. Thus, in the poem before us, numerous allegorical characters are introduced as actors and speakers, the names of some of which† will remind the reader of the popular allegorical vision of John Bunyan.

Of a satire on the Catholic clergy, the Vision of William will, unless we give credence to the alleged antiquity of the Land of Cockayne‡, afford the earliest specimen in the English language: though in French, the continuation of the Roman de la Rose, by John of Meun, precedes §

* Warton, vol. ii. 219. † Dowell, Dobet, and Dobest.

‡ Mr. Campbell (Essay on English Poetry, p. 13) removes this composition, as well on account of the character of its language, as from its allusion to pinnacles not introduced into architecture till the reign of Henry the Third, to a much later date than that assigned to it by Hickes or Warton, *i. e.* about the time of the Conquest. "The total astonishment in which," Mr. Campbell says, "we are left at this opinion, will be felt by all those who have any knowledge of the history of our language, and at the same time any veneration for Hickes or Warton."

§ John of Meun was preceded, as a satirist on the clergy, by the Troubadours.—Sismondi, Lit. du Midi, vol. i. p. 185.

it by about a century. It was written, as has been observed by Tyrwhitt, after the year 1362, since it mentions the "south-westerne winde on Saturday at even," a remarkable hurricane of that year. It may, therefore, be reckoned about twenty years older than the Canterbury Tales.

Should the reader desire to obtain some insight into the contents of this extraordinary work, without perusing the entire poem in the accurate edition of Whittaker, selections from it may be found in Warton's History of English Poetry*. But perhaps the following passage, extracted from Mr. Campbell's Essay on English Poetry, prefixed to his Specimens, will afford a more complete insight into the character of this work, than can easily be given in the same number of words.

"The general object of this work is to expose, in allegory, the existing abuses of society, and to inculcate the public and private duties, both of the laity and clergy. An imaginary seer, afterwards described by the name of William, wandering among the bushes of the Malvern Hills, is overtaken by sleep, and dreams, that he beholds a magnificent tower, which turns out to be the tower

* Vol. i. p. 65, Park's edit.

or fortress of Truth, and a dungeon, which we soon after learn is the abode of Wrong. In a spacious plain in front of it, the whole race of mankind are employed on their respective pursuits, such as husbandmen, merchants, minstrels with their audiences, begging friars, and itinerant venders of pardons, leading a dissolute life under the cloak of religion. The last of these are severely satirised. A transition is then made to the civil grievances of society; and the policy, not the duty, of submitting to bad princes, is illustrated by the parable of the 'Rats and Cats.' In the second canto, True Religion descends, and demonstrates, with many precepts, how the conduct of individuals, and the general management of society, may be amended. In the third and fourth cantos, Mede, or Bribery, is exhibited, seeking a marriage with Falsehood, and attempting to make her way to the courts of Justice, where it appears that she has many friends, both among the civil judges and ecclesiastics. The poem, after this, becomes more and more desultory. The author awakes more than once; but, forgetting that he has told us so, continues to converse as freely as ever with the moral phantasmagoria of his dream. A long train

of allegorical personages, whom it would not be very amusing to enumerate, succeeds. In fact, notwithstanding Dr. Whittaker's discovery of a plan and unity in this work, I cannot help thinking with Warton, that it possesses neither; at least, if it has any design, it is the most vague and ill-constructed that ever entered into the brain of a waking dreamer. The appearance of the visionary personages is often sufficiently whimsical. The Power of Grace, for instance, confers upon Piers Plowman, or 'Christian life,' four stout oxen, to cultivate the field of Truth: these are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the last of whom is described as the gentlest of the team. She afterwards assigns him a like number of stots, or bullocks, to harrow what the evangelists had ploughed; and this new team consists of Saint, or Stot Ambrose, Stot Austin, Stot Gregory, and Stot Jerome."

As a specimen of the style of the "Vision," the following passage, generally adduced* as the prototype of Milton's "Lazar-house," may suffice.

Kinde, or Nature, is described as sending forth

* This striking similarity is noticed in Mrs. Cooper's Muse's Library, p. 18, and also by Warton, vol. ii. 120.

diseases at the command of Conscience, and of his attendants, Age and Death.

Kynde Conscience tho herde, and cam out of the planetta,
And sent forth his forreous feveris and fluxes,
Coughes, cardiacles, crampes, and tothe-aches,
Reumes, and redegoundes, and roynous skalles,
Buyles, and botches, and brennynge agues,
Frennesyes, and foule eviles, forageris of Kynde!
There was "Harrow and Helpe! here cometh Kynde!
With Deeth that is dredful, to undon us alle!"
The lord that lyved aftir lust tho loude criede.—
Age, the hoore, he was in the van-ward,
And bare the banner before Death: by right he it claimed.
Kynde came aftir with many kene soris,
As pockes and pestilences, and moche peple shente.
So Kynde, throgh corruptions, killid ful manye:
* Deeth cam dryvying aftir, and al to dust pashed
Kyngs and knyghtes, kaysours and popis;
Many a lovely lady, and lemmanys of knyghtes,
Swoned and sweltid for sorwe of Dethi's dentes.
Conscience, of his curtesye, to Kynde he besoghte.
To cease, and sofre, and see whether thei wolde
Leve Pride prively, and be parfyt Christene;
And Kynde cecyd tho, to see the peple amende.

As an alliterative poem, and as a satire upon

* Compare *Par. Lost*, l. xi, 477.

the clergy, especially upon the four mendicant orders, "The Plowman's Crede," which may be reckoned contemporary* with the "Canterbury Tales," is a close imitation of the "Vision." The subject of the "Crede" may be comprehended in a very few words. An ignorant layman wishes to learn his creed; he applies to the several orders of friars to instruct him; they answer him by satirising each other. The Carmes promise him salvation without the creed, for money. Disgusted at their hypocrisy, he relates his disappointment to an honest ploughman, whom he finds in the fields. The ploughman answers, by a long invective against the several orders.

The Confessio Amantis.

The great English work of Gower was undertaken at the request of Richard the Second, and seems to have been finished† some time during the first sixteen years of his reign: it may, therefore, be reckoned as about contemporary with the "Plowman's Crede," or the "Legende of Good Women" of Chaucer. Most of Chaucer's earlier poems are

* The "Crede" was certainly written after 1384, since it mentions Wickliffe as no longer living. Wickliffe died in that year.

† Turner's England, vol. v. 259, note.

mentioned in the "Legende *," and many of them clearly belong to the reign of Edward the Third. The "Confessio Amantis" may, therefore, be said immediately to succeed the more youthful productions of our poet. This extraordinary performance combines in its plan, (as indeed the title implies) an heterogeneous union of the Catholic doctrine of confession, with the romantic notions of love prevalent in the author's day. The lover goes forth into the woods to muse despondingly on love; he is met by Cupid† and Venus, the latter of whom, being desirous to ascertain the fidelity of her votary, calls upon Genius, her clerk, or priest, to confess him. Genius illustrates the different virtues and vices which his pupil is to pursue or avoid, by a number of apposite tales, which tales form the great bulk of the poem‡.

* The Legende is addressed to Anne of Bohemia, as queen. She was married to Richard the Second 1382.

† In the age of Gower, the adoption of Pagan mythology, which is now banished to school-boy exercises, was not thought strange or out of character. Cupid and Venus are introduced by Chaucer as the king and queen of Love, both in his "Court of Love" and in the prologue to his "Legende of Good Women:" so, in the "Merchant's Tale," Pluto and Proserpine are the king and queen of Fairy.

‡ This laborious work extends to 30,000 lines, and is, therefore, not very far short of double the length of the "Canterbury Pilgrimage."

Considered as a magazine of stories, this work resembles the "Canterbury Tales," however different and less natural may be the occasion and the framework of the whole. But the professed object of the "Confessio" is moral and instructive: the tales illustrate virtues and vices, while the object of the Canterbury pilgrimage is, to gratify the reader by a pleasing mixture of the serious and the ludicrous. In this respect the work of Chaucer resembles the "Decameron," as that of Gower does the "Gesta Romanorum;" the only difference between these two latter works, as regards the illustration of virtues and vices by tales, being, that in the "Gesta" the moral application follows the stories according to the usual plan of moral fables; while in the "Confessio" it precedes and introduces them.

It is true, that in all poems professing an immediately moral object, there is also an object purely literary: and this in very various degrees in various works. In Tasso, the intended allegory is not dis-

For a complete account of the contents of this poem, see Mr. Turner's Analysis, Hist. of England, vol. v. 284. The only printed edition of the poem, of a modern date, is that contained in the second volume of Chalmers's British Poets; but extracts from the best tales may be found in Mr. Turner's work; and the entire tale of "Florent" is given by Ellis, vol. i. 181. See also Todd's Illustrations, p. 145.

coverable at all from the poem itself. In the "Fairy Queene," were it not for the author's letter to Sir Water Raleigh, we should be much inclined to forget the allegory altogether: but these were the last days of allegorical and moral poetry. In the days of Gower, the clergy and schoolmen held a moral object to be the only excusable part of poetry and literature. Besides this, in English literature, a strict division of labour between the poet and the prose writer had scarcely taken place; and the monkish and dull didactic spirit which appears so strongly in the "Handlyng of Sinne," by Robert of Brunne, and in the "Pricke of Conscience," of Rolle the Hermit, is still observable in the "Confessio Amantis" of Gower. The true and legitimate province of art, whether poetry or painting, is to please the taste, and to fill the imagination, by a just imitation of nature: the subject should form a whole, of which the parts should be skilfully combined. The nature imitated may be physical or moral; elevated, or low and ludicrous; the immediate object of art still continues the same—to please; yet the effect, though not the professed and immediate effect, may be a highly moral one.

But the true and legitimate pleasures of art and literature are unknown, or at least undefined, in a rude age; hence all literature is at first didactic, or moral. The poetry* preceding that of the Homeric poems, is either religious or scientific; and Virgil, when in describing the theme of the bard Iopas at Dido's feast, introduced a genuine trait of a rude age,

Hic canit errantem Lunam, Solisque labores.

The whole history of the early literature of Greece confirms this principle; in adorning physical science with the graces of poetry, Lucretius did but imitate Empedocles†, and other Greek poets; and in morals some of the earlier gnomic poets precede the philosophers. In like manner, the province of history was occupied by metrical chronicles, or cyclic poems, to the didactic nature of which the "Iliad" forms the only known and splendid exception.

I have dwelt a little upon this point, because I think it illustrates, more than any other, the position which Chaucer occupies in the history of our

* See Schœll's Lit. Grecque, vol. i.

† Empedocles wrote a poem περὶ φυσεως.

literature. With the exception of the metrical romances*, he is the first to quit the beaten track of didactic poetry. The light and spirited satire of his Canterbury Pilgrimage, is as unlike the severe and moral satire of the "Vision of William," or of the "Plowman's Crede," as the satire of Horace is unlike that of Juvenal; but the marked epoch which the works of Chaucer form in our literature, as to change of theme, is more strongly exemplified in his earlier, and what, in contradistinction to his Canterbury Tales, may be called his minor poems.

Chaucer the founder of a new school in English poetry.

These are grounded partly on the fantastic notions and fashions of the courtly classes of his day: as, The Court of Love, The Floure and the Leafe, and the prologue to the Legende of Good Women: partly on the pseudo-classical subjects, borrowed or varied, from the mediæval writers on Trojan, or other heroic story; as the Troilus and Cresseide, and the first edition of the Palamon and Arcite—partly on a great contro-

* If we may judge from the epilogue of Caxton to the prose "Morte Arthur" of Sir Thomas Mallory, even the romances appear to have been regarded in a moral point of view; and, indeed, Spenser's allegory combines chivalric characters with a moral object.

versy of this age — the praise or dispraise of women. Besides these subjects, we have four poems relating to the courtship or marriage of some noble knight, generally supposed to be John of Gaunt*; and the "House of Fame." All these poems, heterogeneous as they are in many respects, have at least one point in common; they all, in some way or other, turn upon the subject of love†: even the House of Fame introduces us, in the outset of the work, to a glass temple of Venus, and it is consequently cited, in the prologue to the Legende, among the works of our poet undertaken in the service of the god of love.

By the choice of such subjects, various in most

* In the instance of the "Dutchesse," this supposition amounts to a certainty, since Chaucer himself mentions that poem under the title of "The Death of Blanche, the Dutchesse."—Prologue to Leg.

† It is for this reason that Venus, at the conclusion of Gower's Confessio Amantis, addresses Chaucer as her "disciple and her poete." The "Life of St. Cecilia," translated by Chaucer, in early life, and afterwards embodied in the Canterbury Pilgrimage, as the "Nonne's Tale," forms an exception to the general class of subjects chosen by our poet. The "Origen on the Magdalen," alluded to by him in the prologue to the Legende, may also be liable to the same exception; but it is not extant; for it is clear, from internal evidence, that the "Lamentation of Magdalene," included in Urry's edition of Chaucer, is not the work of our poet.

of their details, but uniting on the topic of love, a revolution was effected in English literature. The favourite themes of the middle classes of society, the religious poems and legends, and the satires on the clergy, in which ploughmen play a distinguished part in exposing the fraud and hypocrisy of friars, were exchanged for the favourite topics of knights and courtiers. In this change of theme, as well as in the excellence and lasting popularity of their respective productions, the age of Chaucer may be compared to that of the Homeric poems. In both ages, the priest ceased to be the only poet, and consequently literature ceased to be confined to religious subjects.

The age of Chaucer compared with the Homeric age.

There is also another point in which these two epochs in literary history may be compared, namely, as regards the depression, or rather decline, of poetry which followed them. Nor are the causes apparently very different, of a decline, which in both instances, seems to have been owing to a distracted and unsettled state of political affairs. But something, perhaps, may be attributed to the want of a drama. In ages when books either do not exist at all, or are very rare

and dear, minstrelsy*, recitation, lectures, or the drama, one or the other, according to the existing state of society, are necessary to connect literature with the great mass of the people. Without means of this nature there can be no public, and consequently there can be no poets. In both the literary epochs, which we are comparing with each other, the drama was not yet in existence. Besides this, the most interesting topics of the respective ages had been exhausted by the genius of great poets. The feeble successors of Chaucer, at least on this side of the Tweed†, are not more to be compared with

* The influence of minstrelsy and recitation was much more extended in ancient Greece than in England, since both were public; the former being used at public festivals; the latter at the Olympic games. In England both were common enough, as late at least as the days of Chaucer, but only in private societies. Lectures apply only to matters of philosophy and learning, and are consequently confined to a few; at Athens, to the schools of the philosophers; in the country and age of Chaucer, chiefly to the students of the scholastic philosophy. The drama is the great vehicle of intellectual entertainment to the people. The vast size of the Grecian theatres is well known. All classes, except women and children, attended.

† Among the Scottish "makers," subsequent to Chaucer, James the First, Dunbar, Gawin Douglas, and Sir David Lyndesay, although sometimes prolix, contain many passages of just and touching description. In vivacity and humour, the "Friars of Berwick," attributed to Dunbar, and the "Squier Meldrum" of Sir David Lyndesay, may rank with the best comic tales of Chaucer.

our poet than are the Cyclic poems, as far as we can judge of their nature, with the Homeric.

In the age of Chaucer, and in the succeeding interval between him and the Elizabethan period, there was no English drama, properly so called. The mysteries which, in the fifteenth century, began to be written in English, were rather matters of religion than of literature. In this view, they were so much encouraged by the clergy, that indulgences were granted for attendance * at their performance: and the Wife of Bathe enumerates miracle-plays, together with pilgrimages, and other religious gaieties of the time.

One only specimen † of an English mystery is assignable, on any substantial ground, to the middle of the fourteenth century. The usual practice of Chaucer's day was, that which had prevailed in England from the days of Fitzstephen ‡: the

* Godwin's Chaucer, i. 140.

† Hallam's Introduct. vol. i. 296. Mr. Hallam seems to hesitate at the expression, "miracle-plays," used by Mr. Collier, in his History of the English Stage, in preference to that of "mysteries;" yet it appears, as well from Chaucer as from "The Plowman's Crede," to have been the expression used in this age.—Warton, vol. ii. p. 70.

‡ The earliest notice of miracle-plays occurs in the "Description of

miracle-plays, if written at all, were in Latin, and for this reason, probably, those performances were conducted by the parish clerks, or the children of conventual and other grammar schools. Absolon, the parish clerk in the Miller's Tale, "playeth Herod on a scaffold hie," a kind of stage, which continued to be used as late as the reign of Elizabeth *.

Taste for English not confirmed.

The minor poems of Chaucer, which, as we have seen, form a striking epoch in the history of English literature, belong, as far as we can ascertain their date, (with the exception of the Legende of Good Women) to the reign of Edward the Third. They touch, often with a masterly hand, not the favourite subjects of ploughmen, and of the lower classes of society, either seriously or satirically†; but the fashionable and courtly topics of the day; and yet we have no proof that

London," by Fitzstephen, secretary to Becket; they are there mentioned amongst the amusements of the citizens of London in his day.—See Fitzstephen's Account, apud Leland's Itinerary.

* Dodsley's Old Plays, Introduct. to "Appius and Virginia."

† The only two exceptions to this general rule are literal translations; namely, the latter part of the "Romaunt of the Rose," in which the friars are satirised; and the "Legende of St. Cecilia."

they excited much interest with the court of Edward.

Tyrwhitt, in observing upon the earliest court appointment of Chaucer, in the year 1367, seems disappointed at not being able to discover that it was granted to him in consequence of his poetical fame. If the chronology which I have adopted * be correct, Chaucer would, in that year, have been about twenty-two, and consequently his poetical character could scarcely have been established. But it is probable that the court of Edward was not much interested in English literature.

We have no proof that Edward himself had any decided literary taste. His taste seems to have been, in common with that of the chivalrous and warlike spirits of the age, for exterior magnificence † ; and this extended, from the trappings of his war-horse, to furniture, and to the bindings of books‡. But whatever taste Edward may have pos-

* See remarks on Life of Chaucer.

† Warton's English Poetry, 286.

‡ See extracts from Edward's household books, in Dibdin's Bibliomania, p. 157 ; also Warton's English Poetry, vol. ii. 174.

sessed for literature, it would, in all probability, have been directed rather to French than English poetry. His mother was a French woman—his wife the patroness of Froissart. Froissart, and Gower, who wrote during this reign a long poem in French *, were amongst the most popular poets † of the day. Mandeville, our earliest prose writer, composed his "Travels" in 1356, in French, and in Latin, as well as in English. And Gower continued to write in Latin ‡ even in the reign of Richard the Second.

The two ecclesiastics, who may be supposed to have had some influence in directing the taste of Edward, were not very likely to promote the study of poetry or polite literature in any language.

* The "Speculum Meditantis." A catalogue of a nobleman's library of the fourteenth century, given by Mr. Todd, in his "Illustrations of Gower and Chaucer," consists of a long list of French works. For Gower's French Ballads, see Todd's Illustrations, p. 102.

† The popularity of Gower, as a poet, continued up to the Elizabethan period. John the Chaplain (after Chaucer), is the first to sing his praises; next to him, Skelton, in his "Crowne of Laurell," p. 240: then Leland; lastly, Sir Philip Sidney, in his "Defence of Poesy," couples the names of Chaucer and Gower, as great poets. See also a note of Warton, (vol. ii. 174,) on a copy of Gower, belonging to Henry the Eighth.

‡ The "Vox Clamantis."

Walter Burley was a professed and distinguished schoolman. Richard Aungerville, of Bury, Bishop of Durham, and Chancellor of England, excuses, rather than recommends the study of the poets, as a means of understanding the Fathers who quote them. "It is objected," he observes, "to the poets, that they are licentious, or if not, that they relate mere fictions: but they are alluded to by the Fathers and Philosophers;—if we are ignorant of the poets, neither shall we understand Jerome, Boethius, Lactantius, or Sidonius *."

The hostility to elegant literature, entertained by the schoolmen and the clergy of Chaucer's day, was much like that professed by the sophists and philosophers of Athens towards the poets and dramatists. In all ages, indeed, there have been two parties in literature, one of which has been strongly opposed to all learning which did not

* Philo-Biblon, c. 13. Aungerville is well known as the collector of a library, which he left to Durham (afterwards Trinity) College, in Oxford. To his diligence and curiosity in matters of research, Petrarch, in one of his letters to Bocaccio, bears witness. Petrarch complains that the Chancellor, whom he had formerly known at the papal court at Avignon, had neglected to notice his correspondence on literary subjects. It does not, however, appear that the Italian poet and scholar had any value for the taste of his acquaintance.

immediately bear, either upon religion, or practical utility. In the age of St. Jerome, and in that of Gregory the Great, the anti-classical spirit became * conspicuous amongst the Christian clergy. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the style of their Latin writings evince some degree of attention to the best authors; but the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are marked, in Europe, by a decline of learning among the clerical orders, caused principally by the relaxed and indolent habits of the seculars, as well as regulars, and by the introduction into the universities, chiefly through the mendicant friars, of the scholastic philosophy.

Meanwhile the vernacular literatures received a polish from the genius of distinguished laymen, which they had scarcely hitherto possessed. Of these, Dante, Petrarch and Bocaccio in Italy, and Chaucer in England, are the most conspicuous in the fourteenth century †.

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* Guinguené, Hist. Litt. chap. i.

† The Commedia of Dante was not published till the beginning of that century.

CHAPTER II.

REPUTATION OF CHAUCER IN VARIOUS AGES.

The Canterbury Pilgrimage, upon which the poetical reputation of Chaucer now chiefly rests, and which opens to us the true character of his genius, does not appear to have obtained avowed and universal admiration till a comparatively late period. This circumstance is doubtless, in a great measure, to be attributed to the satire, which the great work of our poet contains, on the Catholic clergy. Hence perhaps it is, that we find the Canterbury Tales distinctly mentioned, by the poets immediately succeeding him, only on one occasion*; and hence the earliest imitators of his satirical writings, such as the authors of the Plowman's Tale, the Merchant's Second Tale, and Jack Upland, wrote only anonymously.

* Lydgate, in the prologue to his "Fall of Princes," gives a cold and prosaic enumeration of Chaucer's works, and speaks of the Canterbury Tales as "endited full well in our language."

But the neglect which this great work experienced at the hands of critics, extends beyond the period of the Reformation. Fox, the martyrologist, eulogises Chaucer, not for his comic and satiric powers, but for "his true Wicklevian spirit;" and, with the exception of Beaumont's apology * for the ribaldry of the comic tales, and a passage in Puttenham's Arte of Englishe Poetrie †, there is scarcely any distinct recognition of the poetical merits of the Canterbury Pilgrimage anterior to Dryden.

The poet characterised by himself.

Considering that, in all probability, this great work was not begun at a very early period of our author's life, and that it was never finished; considering also the enmity which it must have excited against him from one party in the State, it will not appear very surprising that we find few allusions to it in his own works. Chaucer, indeed, always regards himself ‡ as the poet of Love. On two occasions only he alludes to the Canterbury

* See edition of Chaucer's works 1602.

† See infra. The imitation of two at least of Chaucer's comic characters by Shakspeare are fully noticed in the sequel; I am here speaking rather of the testimonies of professed critics.

‡ See Prologue to Legende—Man of Lawe's Prologue and Testament of Love.

Tales; once towards the conclusion of the Troilus and Cresseide, where he seems to hint that the work is projected and perhaps* begun: and again in a passage of doubtful genuineness, called the Retractation, affixed to the Persoune's Tale. This passage, which has sometimes been cited merely as a proof of Chaucer's repentance for the ribaldry of some of his comic tales, contains also a condemnation of all his works not strictly of a religious character; a spirit of criticism so exactly corresponding with that shown by Richard of Bury in his Philobiblon †, and so thoroughly scholastic and monkish, that it is at once evident, either that Chaucer towards the conclusion of his life abjured all his former opinions on religion and literature,

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* Go litel booke, my litel tragedie,
There God my maker yet ere that I die,
So send me might to make some comedie.

In the lines addressed to Master Bukton, and rather strangely appended to The Dutchesse, allusion is made to the Wife of Bathe:

The wife of Bathe, I pray you that ye rede
Of this matter that we have on honde.

The matter here alluded to being the grand controversy of the day on the subject of celibacy. Comparing this expression with line 9560 of Canterbury Tales, I am led to suppose that Chaucer here alludes to some composition on matrimony, entitled "The Wife of Bathe," and not to the celebrated prologue in the Canterbury Tales.

† C. 13.

(a circumstance for which there is no ground, and which is highly improbable) or that the words in question, which are evidently out of place, were interpolated by the hand of some pious catholic or schoolman.

But be this as it may, on all other occasions at least, Chaucer alludes to his own works as undertaken in the service of the God of Love: and in this view they are regarded also by his friend and contemporary, Gower. In a well-known passage at the conclusion of the "Confessio Amantis," Venus addresses Chaucer as her "disciple and her poete," and enjoins him (in a message sent to him through the author of the Confessio) "to sette an ende of al his worke by making his Testament of Love." If the great English work of Gower is not sufficient to afford us an insight into the exalted nature, entertained in that age, of the character of a true Lover, the Testament of Love carries these extravagancies yet further. In that work, Love (personified as Philosophy is by Boethius), under the character of a beautiful woman, bequeaths to all those who follow her instructions, the knowledge of truth from error—the knowledge

By Gower.

of one very God our Creator,—as also the state of grace and of glory: all which things are typified under the image of a "margerite," or pearl.

After such sentiments as these, and considering the nature of Chaucer's earlier works, all of which * in one way or another turn upon the subject of love; we shall not be surprised at the view taken of his poetical character by his contemporaries. No poet, perhaps, affords such a contrast to himself as does the poet of the Miller's, or of the Nonne's Priest's Tale, to the poet of the Court of Love, of The Floure and the Leaf, and of the prologue to the Legende.—The critics of the present day are accustomed to weigh the pathetic with the comic powers of our author; and to admire the union of both in the same poet. But a very slight review of the earlier criticisms on Chaucer, will convince us, that in neither department was his poetical character either valued or understood, previous to the days of Puttenham and of Spenser.

The earliest successors of Chaucer, John the

* See the enumeration of them under this character in the prologue to the Legende.

Chaplain *, Occleve, and Lydgate, in celebrating the praises, or lamenting the death, of their "greate maister," all harp upon one theme: the eloquence, or "rhetoricke," as they usually style it, of the departed poet. And this, indeed, is the term which Chaucer himself fixes upon, in praising Petrarch†. But if any two poets afford a contrast to each other, and exhibit qualities directly opposite, these two are Chaucer and Petrarch. The latter is the poet of language and of style—the former the poet of vigorous thought, and of matter: amongst other proofs, therefore, of the very slight degree in which the poetical character of Chaucer was felt and understood in a later, and a more learned, age, I would refer the reader to a passage of Ascham‡, from which it appears that Chaucer and Petrarch were the rivals in his days for poetical reputation.

His language the chief subject of praise.

The term "rhetoryke," then, although not unaptly applied to Petrarch, will not in the slightest degree portray the characteristic excellencies of

* See Turner's History of England, vol. v. p. 257, and the testimonies prefixed to Urry's Chaucer.

† Clerk's Prologue.

‡ See Testimonies, apud Urry's Chaucer.

our eldest English poet. Perhaps, indeed, the most striking quality of Chaucer's works, at least on our first acquaintance with them, will be the beauty and vigour which many of his descriptive passages have attained, notwithstanding not only the rudeness and imperfection of his metre and language, but even the homeliness of his style and diction. Yet rude as this language, and unornamented as this style, now appears to us, so manifest an improvement was it upon that of his predecessors, that from his own day to that of Leland and William Thynne—the one, his earliest biographer; the other, the first editor of his entire works—this peculiar excellence of Chaucer, trifling as it is in comparison with his real merits as a poet, seems to have occupied the attention of his admirers, to the exclusion of every other. Skelton, in his "Crowne of Laurell," written in 1489, continues in the same strain with John the Chaplain, Occleve, and Lydgate; and extols both Gower and Chaucer as the garnishers and refiners of the rude English tongue: and Hawes, in his "Pastime of Pleasure," speaks of Chaucer much in the same strain. The Latin verses of Leland inserted in

his Life of Chaucer*, and prefixed to William Thynne's edition, touch on this subject alone. But Leland, in all that he has said of our poet, seems to have been more careful of his own reputation for eloquence, than for that of his author: he sacrifices fact to style; and in the vagueness of his criticisms†, shows as much negligence of the poetry of Chaucer, as ignorance of the authentic facts of his life, by unfounded detail.

His learning.

In the dedication of Thynne to Henry the Eighth the poet is praised, according to the affected pedantry of the day, for his "excellent learning in all kindes of doctrines and sciences," and for "his sharpnesse and quicknesse in conclusion, in a time, when either by the disposition and influence of the heavenly bodies, or, by the ordinaunce of God, al good letters were laid asleepe through the world‡."

* This Life may be found in the second volume of the British Bibliographer, p. 4.

† What can be more absurd than the following often quoted sentence? On his leaving Oxford (where by the bye he never was, as far as we know, educated) Leland says of Chaucer that he was "acutus dialecticus, dulcis rhetor, lepidus poeta, gravis philosophus, ingeniosus mathematicus, denique sanctus theologus."

‡ To avoid prolixity, I have abridged the lengthy sentences of the original.

Thus, in a contemporary dedication of the "Confessio Amantis" to the same monarch, that work is praised as "plentifully stuffed and fournished with manifolde eloquent reasons, sharpe and quicke argumentes, and examples of great auctoritie, perswadynge unto vertue, not onely taken out of the poetes, oratours, historie writers, and philosophers, but also, out of the Holy Scriptures."

This practical and philosophical view of the merits of Chaucer continued in force till the latter years of the sixteenth century. Webbe*, in his "Discourse of English Poetry," praises the poet in the spirit of Fox, Bale, or the most zealous Protestants.

Puttenham, a contemporary of Webbe, is the first critic who seems in any degree to understand either the history of our author's works, or their poetical merits. "Though many of his bookes be but bare translations out of the Latin and French, yet they are wel handled, as his bookes of Troilus and Cresseide, and the Romaunt of the Rose,

* "Although corruption bare such sway in most matters, that learning and truth might skant be admitted to shewe itself, yet without controllment might hee girde at the vices and abuses of all states, and gawle them with very sharpe and eger inventions."

whereof he translated but one halfe; the device was John of Mehune's*, a French poet: the Canterbury Tales were Chaucer's own invention, as I suppose, and where he showeth more the natural of his pleasant wit than in any other of his workes; his similitudes, comparisons, and all other descriptions, are such as cannot be amended. His metre heroical, of Troilus and Cresseide, is very grave and stately, keeping the staffe of seven, and the verse of ten: his other verses of the Canterbury Tales be but riding ryme, neverthelesse very well becoming the matter of that pleasaunt pilgrimage, in which every man's part is played with much decency†." This passage, though it does not display any very deep knowledge in literary history, may, considering the age in which it was written, be regarded as a masterly outline of the poetical character of our author, and forms a striking con-

* The inaccuracies in literary history contained in this passage, will easily be detected by the reader. No mention is made of William of Lorris, the author of the first and most poetical portion of The Rose: and the terms designating the Troilus and Cresseide as a bare translation, and the Canterbury Tales as altogether an original work, are too general.

† Art of Poetrie, c. xxxi. 1589. This testimony is strangely omitted in those cited in Urry's edition.

trast to the vagueness with which Sidney, in his "Defence of Poesie," characterized the poet, "as seeing clearly in a mystic time," and as "beautifying our mother tongue."

To enter into a history of the conflicting opinions with regard to the merits of Chaucer's language, which began about this time, and which even a late distinguished critic has condescended to notice*, would be to imitate the puerile spirit of the controversy itself. It may, however, be amusing to observe, not only the opposite statements which have been made by different critics on this subject, but even the opposite inferences which have been drawn from the same statement. Up to the days of Leland and William Thynne, there was, as we have seen, but one opinion on this subject. Chaucer was the "floure of rhetoricke," the "garnisher of Englishe rude." Webbe first ventures to hint that "the manner of his style may seeme blunt and course to many fine English eares at these days." In the days of which Webbe speaks, the English tongue, besides the natural polish which it had acquired from the labours of successive writers, was

Various opinions with regard to his language.

* See Tyrwhitt, Essay prefixed to the Canterbury Tales.

also affectedly interlarded with artificial ornaments, borrowed chiefly from the Spanish and Italian languages. These "ink-horn terms," as they were called, form a frequent theme of ridicule in the comedies of Ben Jonson and Shakspeare. Similar affectations and innovations were encouraged and extended by the "Euphues*" of John Lilye; and Spenser, finding the ornate style, which was then becoming popular, abhorrent from the nature and subject of his romantic poem, adopted at once the language of Chaucer, as a "well of English undefiled." The genuine English style of this age lay between the obsolete diction of Chaucer, and the affectations above-mentioned. This is accurately felt, and sensibly pointed out, by an old writer somewhat senior to Spenser. Peter Asheton, in dedicating his translation† of a treatise by Paulus Jovius to Sir Ralph Sadler, desires him "not so much to regarde and loke for picked termes, and strange Englishe wordes, (whiche, indeed, be not here,) as for the playne settinge forthe of the sentence‡, and right declaration of the history. For truly throughout al this simple and rude transla-

* London, 1580. † 1546. ‡ Matter.

tion, I studyied rather to use the most playn and famylier English speech, then ether Chaucer's wordes, (whiche, by reason of antiquitie, be almost out of use,) or els ink-horne termes (as they call them) whiche the common people, for lacke of Latin, do not understand*."

Verstegan, in his Restitution of Decayed† Intelligence, and Skinner, in the preface to his Etymologicon Anglicanum, have censured Chaucer for what formed the constant argument in his praise, up to the Elizabethan period of our literature: namely, for the introduction of French terms into English. Rymer‡, in a passage which shows that

* British Bibliographer, vol. ii. 94. † C. vii.

‡ "They who attempted verse in English down to Chaucer's time made an heavy pudder, and are always miserably put to it for a word to clink; which commonly falls so awkward and unexpectedly, as dropping from the clouds by some machine or miracle. Chaucer found an Herculean labour on his hands, and did perform to admiration. He seized all Provençal, French, or Latin that came in his way, gives them a new garb and livery, and mingles them amongst our English: turns out English gouty or superannuated, to place in their room the foreigners fit for service, trained and accustomed to poetical discipline.

"Chaucer threw in Latin, French, Provençal, and other languages, like new stum to raise a fermentation; in Queen Elizabeth's time, it grew fine, but came not to an head and spirit, did not shine and sparkle, till Mr. Waller set it a running."—Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy.*

he has reaped the full advantage of the philological labours of our poet, first introduces him to us as a recruiting officer of our language; and afterwards, proceeding more scientifically to explain the chemical process, by which that tongue was formed, he represents Chaucer as a skilful brewer of English.

This tedious and puerile controversy may, perhaps, be best disposed of by referring to a simple principle in the history of language. In proportion as a nation becomes literary, the study of foreign languages (whether modern or those of antiquity) and the translations made from those languages into the native tongue, bring with them a variety of new expressions, by which the original poverty of that tongue is enriched. Thus languages, like nations, or even like the physical substances of nature, are formed by a union of various elements, useless in themselves, but rendered valuable by combination. Amongst those who first "employed themselves to the beautifying and bettering of the English tongue," (to use the words of his oldest editor, William Thynne,) was "that noble and famous clerke, Geffray Chaucer." But in the in-

terval which had elapsed between the days of

> "Old Dan Geffrey, in whose gentle spright
> The pure well-head of poetry did swell*."

and those of his illustrious successor, who thus characterises him, the innovations which Verstegan and Skinner charge solely upon Chaucer, had been so far increased, that his language had become obsolete; and the adoption of it by Spenser is only to be justified, on the ground of its being in harmony with his theme.

With the mention of the name of Spenser, we have arrived at a period in the history of Chaucer's reputation more interesting and important. From this æra to the present day, the morning star of English poetry has been constantly either imitated or extolled by his successors. To this general rule there seems, indeed, to be one solitary exception: Cowley† is said to have despised Chaucer. I must leave it to the judgment of the critical reader to determine which of the two poets suffers the most by this decision.

The testimony which Spenser has borne to the excellence of our author's poetry, is not confined to Spenser.

* Fairy Queene, l. 7, c. vii. st. 9. † Warton on Pope, vol. ii. p. 8.

a mere general imitation of his phraseology. The "gentleman who wrote the late Shepheardes Callender" (as he is styled by Puttenham) frequently alludes to, and professedly imitates, Chaucer, in that his earliest work. And that his admiration for the elder bard did not diminish in after years, is substantially proved, by the numerous images and descriptions in the Fairy Queene, based upon those of our poet.

Many of the allegorical descriptions in the "Romaunt of the Rose," improvements as they are upon the French originals of William of Lorris, will remind the reader of Spenser's Fairy Queene. The image of Hypocrisy, in particular, which so attracted the admiration of Barclay, that in his translation of the "Shippe of Fooles," he has inserted it at length, seems to have suggested that of Archimago *. The well-known description of

* And by his belt a booke he hanging had.

And again—

He told of saintes and popes, and evermore
He showed an Ave-Mary after and before.—SPENSER.

A psalter fast she held in hand
And busily she gan to fond,
To make many a faint prayere
To God and to his saintes dere.—CHAUCER.

trees in the opening of Spenser's great work, is taken almost verbatim from that in the Parliament of Fowles, a poem distinctly mentioned in another part of the Fairy Queene, under the title of "The Fowles* Parley." Merlin's Mirrour† seems borrowed from the mirror presented to Cambuscan by the stranger knight in The Squier's Tale. And the description of the cave of Morpheus in The House of Fame, or rather, that in the opening lines of The Dutchesse, evidently formed the ground-work‡ of the celebrated description of Spenser. It must be admitted, however, that on this occasion (as on most others) the picture of Spenser is more rich and finished than that of the elder poet. The original description from whence Chaucer borrowed his general idea, is to be found in Ovid§; but the English poet has not followed

* L. 7, c. 7, s. 9. † L. 3, c. xi. See Warton on Spenser.

‡ And more to lulle him in his slumber soft
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever drizzling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the soune
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swoune.—SPENSER.

Save that there werein a fewe welles
Came running fro the cliffes adoune
That made a deadly sleping soune.—CHAUCER.

§ Met. xi. 612.

his favourite Latin author very closely; and Spenser has much enriched his description by the introduction of the double gates of sleep, from the sixth book of Virgil's Æneid. If Chaucer may be regarded as the master of Spenser, in allegorical and picturesque description, it must be confessed that, on the whole, the pupil excels the instructor: though, perhaps, in point of forcible painting and contrast, it would be difficult to produce any passages from the Fairy Queene, equal to the portraits of the rival kings, Lycurgus and Emetrius, in The Knight's Tale. The simplicity of the diction in these passages, as well as in those describing suicide and madness, is so far from destroying the sublimity of the poetry, that it seems, as with Dante, only to heighten it.

Judging from Spenser's imitations of Chaucer, we might conclude, that his favourite works were The Dutchesse, the Parliament of Fowles, and the Squier's Tale: but, perhaps, (as also in the case of Milton's well known and pathetic allusion to the latter poem) these imitations are rather to be received as evidence of the general admiration of Spenser for the works of his predecessor, than of

his partiality for any particular passages. We should not, perhaps, expect to discover in this poet much allusion to the comic powers of our author*; but, it seems, that during the lifetime of Spenser, and while his Fairy Queene, as well as the great tragic dramas of Shakspeare, were either unknown or unvalued, the poetical character of Chaucer was rather viewed in reference to his pathetic, than to his comic powers. It is true, indeed, that the Canterbury Pilgrimage was the earliest of his works to issue from the press†: it is also true, that Sir David Lyndesay, in his Monarchie, and his Satyre of the Three Estaites, as also John Heywood, in his comic dialogues, when they satirize the Catholic clergy and superstitions, follow, occasionally, rather closely in the track of the Canterbury Tales: but whoever takes a general view of the allusions which either poets or critics‡ have made to our author during the Elizabethan

* Spenser's "Mother Huberd's Tale" is, however, a close imitation of the Nonne's Priest's Tale of Chaucer.

† Caxton, 1476. The Troilus and Cresseide, however, (Caxton, without date) may have been as early a printed work, and could not have been much later.

‡ Puttenham says, "his natural wit was most shown in the Canterbury Tales;" but this opinion forms an exception to the general criticism of his age.

period, will, probably, be persuaded, that the pathetic poems of Chaucer occupied the attention and engaged the admiration of the leading spirits of the age, more frequently than the ludicrous and comic portions of the Canterbury Tales.

Amongst the pathetic poems, the Knight's Tale, and the "Troilus and Cresseide*," have always maintained a precedency. The latter especially seems to have been a favourite in the age of Spenser. Puttenham, and Sidney, the former in his Art of Poetrie, the latter in his Defence of Poesie, both select this work as especially worthy of praise: and Sidney indeed scarcely mentions any other. With Beaumont also this was a favourite work. Shakspeare, although there can

* The value which the poet himself set upon this poem is evident, as well from his addressing it to the "moral Gower" and the "philosophical Strode," as from the following stanza towards the conclusion.

> And, for there is so great diversitie
> In English, and in writing of our tong,
> So pray I to God, that none miswrite thee,
> Ne the misse-metre, for defaut of tong;
> And redde where so thou be, or eles song,
> That thou be understood, God, I beseech,
> But yet to purpose of my rather speech †.

† Former subject. Honourable mention is also made of this poem in the "Testament of Love," book 3, p. 301. See Turner's Hist. of England, vol. v. p. 393.

scarcely exist any doubt that he was an admirer of the beauties of this work, has, in the plot of his Midsummer Night's Dream, given us yet clearer proof of his acquaintance with the Knight's Tale. The part which Duke Theseus acts, as an arbiter in the affairs of love, is the same both in the poem and the drama: and from no other authority than that of Chaucer could our great dramatist have derived this leading incident of his work; at least it is not very probable that, (even if his knowledge of Italian sufficed for the task) he should have consulted the Teseide of Bocaccio, in preference to an author for whom, as will presently appear, he had a decided partiality. The history of Theseus, however, is by no means exactly similar in the respective productions of Shakspeare and Chaucer. In both instances indeed, he is the husband of Hippolita, and in both he preserves his well-known passion for the chase; but in the drama he is introduced as returning from his victory over the Amazons, and as on the point of celebrating his nuptials with the Amazon Queen: in the Tale he is first known to us as the conqueror of Creon, and the avenger of the suppliant widows of the seven chiefs. Shakspeare.

The manners of the Knight's Tale are strictly feudal; those of the introduction to the Midsummer Night's Dream in some measure classical. In the latter the old father pleads the ancient law of Athens, as giving him a power of life and death over his child: in the former the disputes are to be settled by combat alone. "Knightes of retenue and eke squires" take the place of Grecian heroes; and May Games are celebrated both by Emelie and Arcite. On the other hand the mythology of the poem is altogether classical, while that of the drama is founded on the popular superstitions of the middle ages. As Shakspeare, if not the first, is at least amongst the very first * who introduced the popular fairies into our poetical system, it may be as well, perhaps, to remark in this place on the distinction between the fairy mythology of Shakspeare and that of Chaucer.

According to the popular superstitions of Eng-

* According to Malone, the Midsummer Night's Dream was written in 1592. Romeo and Juliet appeared in 1599; in 1600, John Lilye's "Mayde's Metamorphosis." The Tempest is of uncertain date, but later probably than the preceding dramas. The "Satyr" of Ben Johnson dates 1603; Drayton's "Nymphidia" not till after 1605. (See Tyrwhitt's note on the Merchant's Tale.) The Pastorals of Browne 1613. See the passages relating to fairy mythology collected by Keightley, "Fairy Mythology," vol. ii.

land, and of most of the Teutonic nations, fairies are a diminutive race of supernatural beings, who appear at night dancing in circlets, and clothed generally in green or white. Their principal occupation is to annoy the human race, by various tricks and mischievous feats; though sometimes, as in the case of the Scottish brownie, their object may be a benevolent one; but, generally speaking, the exploits of the mock fairies in the Merry Wives of Windsor, may be taken as a fair specimen of their usual proceedings. Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, though, according to* Burton, of a less diminutive size, is their usual attendant and coadjutor in these mischievous pranks. Thus far our own popular mythology.—The land of Fairy, the king and queen of Fairy Land, and the magical powers attributed to the Archimago of Spenser, or the Fate of Ariosto, appear to us only through the means of literature; the existence of a Fairy land and kingdom seems to be recognised in certain fragments of the Scandinavian Voluspa†; this notion therefore belongs rather to the literature of the North; but the magical fairy

* Anat. of Mel. p. 47.

† Drake's Shakspeare and his Times, vol. 2. p. 302.

is clearly of eastern descent. The power of metamorphosing the shapes of men and animals, exercised more liberally by Alcina than by the Circe of the Odyssey, is the usual attribute of the fairy in the Arabian nights. The fairies of Spenser and of Chaucer belong to this latter class, and have nothing in common with the diminutive northern fairy, except their immortality. Indeed a confusion between two races, so clearly distinct, seems only to have arisen, from our adopting into the English language, as an appellation of our own fairies, a word* of Eastern origin. The first occasion on which the word *fairy* occurs in our own literature is in the Travels of Sir John Mandeville; where "a fayre ladie of Faerie" is introduced as the guardian of a sparehauk, endowed with supernatural attributes†. In the Squier's Tale of Chaucer, the term "faerie" is introduced, much in the same sense, as applied to the land of magic or of supernatural agency:

* Peri.

† "And who that will wake that sparehauk 7 dayes and 7 nyghtes, and as sume men seyn, 3 dayes and 3 nyghtes, withouten companye and withouten sleep, that farre lady schal geven him, when he hath don the first wyssche that he wil wyssche, of earthely things: and that hath been proved oftentymes." P. 170, edit. 1725.

among the various opinions expressed by the wondering crowd, as to the origin of the "horse of brass," some deemed that it was of Faerie. And the stranger Knight himself is thus compared to Sir Gawain, the well-known nephew of King Arthur.

> This strange knight that come thus sodenly
> Al armed save his hed ful richely,
> Saluteth king and queene, and lordes alle,
> By order, as they saten in the halle,
> With so high reverence and observance,
> As wel in speeche as in his contenance,
> That Gawain with his olde curteaie,
> Though he were come agen out of Faerie *,
> Ne coude him not amenden with a word.

In the Merchant's Tale, Pluto and Proserpine are introduced as the king and queen of Fairy, and exercise their powers in restoring the sight of January at a very critical moment. But the Tale of Chaucer, most strictly to be called a fairy tale, is that of the Wife of Bathe, in which the offending bachelor is instructed by a fairy (who

* Tyrwhitt, in a note on the Merchant's Tale, expresses a hope that Chaucer did not consider the Kingdom of Arthur and the Kingdom of Fairie as of equal improbability. This passage seems rather to show that the critic's hopes were vain. See introductory lines of Wife of Bathe's Tale.

afterwards becomes his wife) that the love of sway, rather than that of pleasure, is the ruling passion of women; the discovery of which secret, since it had been made the condition of his pardon, restores him to favour at the court of Arthur.

From the preceding hints, it will be perceived that the fairies of Chaucer are of a race entirely distinct from those of Shakspeare: the latter belonging rather to the northern, the former rather to the eastern mythology. Sir John Mandeville's Fairy is in all probability derived from an eastern tale. The fairies of the "Arabian Nights," are much of the same class; and those of Ariosto seem to be derived, together with most of his supernatural agency, from an eastern source. Between the fairies of Spenser and Chaucer, there is one remarkable similarity. The Fairy land of both poets, is identified with the kingdom of Arthur.

The only characteristic of the popular fairies which is observable in those of Chaucer, is the circumstance of their "dancing on the grene," to which circumstance allusion is made in the beautiful and picturesque introduction to the Wife of Bathe's Tale. Shakspeare, on the other hand, in

the characters of his Oberon and Titania, has introduced into the popular superstitions a part of the fairy mythology of poetry.

It will not, perhaps, appear very fanciful to adduce the King and Queen of the Fairies in the Midsummer Night's Dream, as a proof of Shakspeare's* acquaintance with the Merchant's Tale. Nor will the reader be probably more disposed to cavil at the opinion, that the feats of Queen Mab, in Romeo and Juliet, are based on the following passage in the Parliament of Fowles:—

> The wearie hunter sleeping in his bedde,
> The wood agen his mind goeth anone,
> The judgé dremeth, how his plees be spedde,
> The carter dremeth, how his cartes gone,
> The rich, of gold, the knight fights with his fone,
> The sické mette he dremeth of the tonne,
> The lover mette he hath his lady wonne.

It would seem, at least, that this passage, although in no way connected with fairy mythology, had suggested the general idea of the exploits of the fairy queen, as described by Mercutio†.

* Tyrwhitt (Introductory Discourse, sect. xxii.) gives it as his opinion, that the Pluto and Proserpina of Chaucer were the true progenitors of Shakspeare's Oberon and Titania.

† Romeo and Juliet, act i. sc. iv.

It has been a question whether the Troilus and Cressida of Shakspeare contains any unequivocal proof of an imitation of the elder poet. Mr. Godwin argues, in his usual loose style, that the drama was principally founded on the poem of Chaucer. Yet the two productions are widely different, both in general spirit, in the characters, and in the detail of the incidents. There is throughout the whole poem a delicacy of sentiment, which occurs in the drama, only in detached passages: and the Pandarus of Chaucer, in particular, is by no means the low character introduced into the drama,—the "Sir Pandarus of Troy," whose proverbial reputation the fustian Pistol, in another of Shakspeare's works*, rejects with disdain. Add to this, that many of the circumstances in the work of the dramatist (as, for instance, the names† of the gates of Troy) are borrowed from Lydgate's Troy-Book, which is usually supposed to have been Shakspeare's principal authority‡.

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* "Shall I Sir Pandarus of Troy become?"
Merry Wives of Windsor, act i. sc. iii.

† Prolegomena to Shakspeare, vol. ii. p. 40; Variorum Edit. of 1803; or Farmer's Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare.

‡ The anachronisms of Chaucer and Shakspeare, both probably rather the consequence of a careless imitation of their originals than of their

But although there is no direct evidence of imitation of Chaucer, in the play of "Troilus and Cressida," it is, on the other hand, highly improbable that a poem of great intrinsic merit, one of the earliest productions of Caxton's press, and a work which was admired, not only by Puttenham and Sidney, but also by Beaumont, an intimate friend of Shakspeare's, should have been either unknown to, or unadmired by, our great dramatist.

Shakspeare is the earliest of our great and distinguished poets, who gives evidence of a fine taste and relish for the comic powers of Chaucer. There is, indeed, much in the comic genius of our eldest poet, which closely resembles that of his admirer and imitator. In the use of Satirical Parodies, the two poets appear to have been animated by the same spirit. Chaucer, in his "Rhyme of Sir Thopas," openly ridicules the metrical romances of his day. In the minute discriminations of trees and of birds in the "Parliament of Fowles," and in the allusions to the pomp of Cambuscan's feast, and

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own historical ignorance, are equally gross. Cresseide, in the poem, sits in a paved parlour reading from Statius the Gesta of the Siege of Thebes; Hector, in Shakspeare, quotes Aristotle.

Custance's wedding, in the Knight's, and in the Man of Lawe's Tale, the tedious descriptions which frequently occur in contemporary poetry seem to be tacitly satirized. In the jocose style, also, in which the gravest philosophical subjects are treated in the Nonne's Priest's Tale, and in the medical advice which Pertelotte gives to Chaunticlere, the pedantry and quackery of the day are probably condemned. All this is much in the spirit of our great dramatist; and for the satire contained in the "Rhyme of Sir Thopas," an exact parallel may be found in the play performed before the Court in "Hamlet," and in the bombastic language of Pistol; in both of which, the turgid and affected style of contemporary play-writers is exposed.

The only one of Shakspeare's comic characters, which has fairly survived the change of society and religion, intervening between his time and that of Chaucer, is the Host of the "Merry Wives of Windsor." The pedant, the ignorant curate, and the country justice of the Elizabethan period, were very different characters from the learned clerks, the friar, or the frankelein of the fourteenth century:

and the Euphuist had no parallel in that day. The Host, familiar with all his guests, yet discriminating in the titles of courtesy applied to each, preserves, in real life, the same station in society, the same professional character, in both ages. The poetical part, also, which he is called upon to enact, is the same in the drama as in the "Canterbury Pilgrimage." In both, he is the centre upon which the plot turns *, the president and director of the whole proceedings: and as mediator, the Host of the Garter may even yet more aptly be compared to the Grecian Chorus than Harry Bailey himself.

Perhaps the closest similarity between the comic genius of the two poets may be seen, in the clear markings which each have left us of the personal defects of their characters. We have before us the portraits of Slender or of Falstaff, of the Reve or of the Host, as distinctly as if they had been painted instead of written. But the most striking coincidence between Chaucer and Shakspeare in this respect, exists in the fiery features

* A popular illustration of this part of the host's character may be found in the character of Grojan (I hope I do not misname him) in Mr. Theodore Hook's "Doubts and Fears."

common to the Sompnour and Bardolph. The very terms employed by the two poets are the same. The fire-red cherubim's face of the drunken Sompnour, with its "whelks and knobbs," is a clear and evident prototype of the "malmsey-nosed knave," whose face is described by Fluellen "as all bubucles, and whelks, and knobs, and flames of fire." From the days of Shakspeare, the comic powers of Chaucer have been the constant theme of admiration both with critics and poets. In allegorical description he may have been excelled by Spenser, in pathos by Shakspeare, in sublimity by Milton; but in true comic humour, and more especially in the delineation of professional characters, he has few equals, no superiors. Pope, with the intention of selecting a favourable specimen of his comic power, has modernized the Merchant's Tale, and the Prologue of the Wife of Bathe. Dryden, in his choice of the Nonnes Priest's Tale, has fixed upon one of our author's works, which, while it equally abounds in wit with the selections of Pope, is less objectionable on the score of indecency. Warton * gives the preference to the Mil-

* History of English Poetry, ii. 258.

ler's Tale, a work which Tyrwhitt supposes original, but which is now believed to have been borrowed from a common source with one of the stories of Masuccio *.

Of his own versions of Chaucer's poems, Dryden speaks with all the sober confidence of true genius. After defending the utility of his labours; "I will dare to add," he says, "that what beauties I lose in some places, I give to others which had them not originally: but in this I may be partial to myself. Let the reader judge, and I submit to his decision." Did the interest to be derived from Chaucer's works arise solely from their poetical merits, and did not their historical interest, as descriptive of contemporary manners and opinions, enter at all into the question, the preceding criticism of Dryden upon his remodifications of Chaucer might be regarded as just. But as it is, the improvements and additions of Dryden, are in fact, blemishes fully as great as his omissions. Compare in this point of view his character of the Good Parson, and his introductory

* British Bibliographer.

lines to the Wife of Bathe's Tale, with the originals of these two celebrated passages. In the former we have a cold and unnecessary allusion to the politics of Richard the Second and his successor. In the latter we find the fairy mythology of Chaucer supplanted by the popular creed introduced by Shakspeare. In this latter respect indeed, Pope, in his "January and May," is equally faulty with Dryden. But the imitations of Pope have all the freshness of original poems: while the lines of Dryden, from their very closeness and similarity, are constantly reminding us of the original; and this more particularly in the most descriptive * passages.

The originality of Pope's versions of Chaucer, (a quality which pervades his translations generally), will, though seemingly inconsistent with the professed object of a rifacimento, ultimately secure a lasting popularity to his works of this description. As the general mass of readers become more deeply versed in literature, they

* Compare the allegorical descriptions in the Knight's Tale, the description of Chaunticlere, and the hue and cry raised after Dan Russel the Fox, in the Nonne's Priest's Tale.

are at once less in need of the assistance of modern versions, and more capable of understanding and enjoying the merits of original productions.

As monuments of the taste and genius of a vigorous poet and a polished versifier, Dryden's translations of Chaucer will ever be regarded and esteemed; but the day, if it has not already arrived, is at least not very far distant, when they will cease to be read as substitutes for the originals. Strictly speaking indeed, no translation, no rifacimento, can afford an equivalent for the works of a poet of other days. Nor is this less true, when the value of the older poet much consists in the picture which he presents to us, not merely of the persons and costume (which in themselves would be mere trifles) but of the social habits, the opinions, and the humours of a remote age. Let any one who remembers the soliloquy of the parasite Gnatho*, the sharp wrangling dialogues between Cleon and his rival †, or the scene in the middle‡ aisle of Paul's, ask himself what these scenes would be, if travestied into

* "Eunuch" of Terence. † "Knights" of Aristophanes.
‡ "Every Man out of his Humour."

another or a more modern language. The very diction itself is a part of the times, and we cannot afford to lose it. Read the Parson's Character, or the Wife of Bathe's Tale, in Dryden—it is not merely that the polished language of the modern poet harmonizes little with the rude ancient theme; it is not merely that allusions to modern manners (though certainly in much less offensive degree than in the versions of Betterton or Markland) occasionally break the spell: the very language itself, (nay, even a modernized orthography,) transports us at once from the days of the Plantagenets to those of the Stuarts*.

The truth is, that into every translation, over-literal though it may be, modern terms, and, with them, modern notions and the description of modern habits, will intrude. What translation of the Odyssey will convey us to the rural dwelling of Eumæus, the Reve of his day, or portray the minstrels† and the dancers of the court of Alcinous? So

* Guinguené, after translating the behaviour of the Prioresse at table into French prose, criticises the minuteness of the description (which is precisely what makes it valuable) as caricature. Hist. Lit. vol. iii. p. 110.

† Demodocus, or the Βηταρμενις.

if we would converse with our own ancestors, and enter into their humours and habits, we must repair to Chaucer himself, not to his translators or imitators. No age is so variously or so minutely depicted in any author, either in prose or rhyme, as that of Edward the Third, and his successor, in the works of Chaucer. In the orations of Thucydides, or of Demosthenes, we have the Knights of Athens; in the comedies of Aristophanes, their opponents the Churls; in the Latinized versions of Menander, and others, given us by Terence and Plautus, the follies and vices of the middle class of the gentry; in the "Characters" of Theophrastus, mixed up with much general satire, we have many traits of manners peculiarly Athenian; in Ben Jonson, every possible variety of the blackguard of his day; in Chaucer, combining his earlier and more serious, with his later and satirical, works, we have all these from the hand of the same master. As portraying the habits, and as participating in the sentiments of the middle classes of his day, Chaucer affords a marked contrast to his contemporary, Froissart. Froissart, throughout his whole life, wrote only for

princes. In his poems and romances he treats of the favourite courtly topic, the all-engrossing subject, of love. In his Chronicles, as in the Iliad, we have but a variety of the Knight; and that, rather the hero of poetical chivalry, than the true historical Knight of Chaucer. In his sentiments he is true to the old heroic and feudal principle expressed by Horace, when speaking of the Iliad *; and he accounts the blood of churls as of no value, when weighed in the scale with the honour of knighthood. In Chaucer we find depicted the rural dwelling of the Reve, and the lonely cottage, of the "poure widowe," who is described as a "maner dey," the lowest class of labourers: "ful sooty was hire hall, and eke hire bower." But Froissart never condescends to smoky rafters; he dwells always in the tapestried halls of princes, and delights to describe their unlimited power and their costly magnificence.

On a general review of the history of Chaucer's reputation, we may say that his language, which seems chiefly to have attracted the notice of his

* Delirant reges plectuntur Achivi.

immediate successors, rude as it now appears, was with reference to his own age in itself a marvel. How just were the grounds upon which the critics of the days of Henry the Eighth extolled his learning, will be more fully shown in the following chapter. His pathetic powers, which engaged the admiration of the poets and critics of the age of Elizabeth, continue even now to rival his genuine comic humour. Without, therefore, attempting to defend the ribaldry of some of his ludicrous tales, the homeliness of his diction, or the occasional lameness of his versification (on all of which failings he himself, with his usual candour and modesty, I had almost said naïveté*, observes), in all the sterling and substantial qualities of a true poet, he may well bear a comparison with the master-spirits of all ages. The vigorous yet finished painting—both of scenes and characters, serious as well as ludicrous—with which his works abound, are still, notwithstanding the roughness of their clothing, beauties of a highly poetical nature. The ear may not always be satisfied,

* "Prologue to Cant. Tales," "Man of Lawe's Prologue," and "House of Fame," Book III.

but the mind of the reader is always filled ; and even the roughness of his verse, which may offend some readers, is in many instances—at least in the case of his earlier poems—rather to be attributed to the errors of transcribers (that mis-writing and "misse-metring" against which he warns* his copyists) than to his own negligence.

* "Troilus and Cresseide," *in fine.*

CHAPTER III.

REMARKS ON THE BIOGRAPHY OF CHAUCER.

AUTHENTIC materials for a Life of Chaucer can be derived from two sources only: first, from public documents (*i. e.* for the most part royal patents, appointing him to various state employments or pensions); secondly, from the testimony of his own works, or of those of his immediate contemporaries.

The short * account of his earliest biographer, Leland, written more than a century after the latest possible date of Chaucer's death, is full of inconsistencies, and is in some instances at variance with the testimony of the poet himself. In the "Testament of Love," Chaucer speaks of London as

* This account seems to have led Warton (Hist. of Engl. Poetry, vol. ii.) into the numerous errors with regard to Chaucer's early life, which he has embodied in the short view which he has given of the poet's character. To these errors of Leland, he has also added that of making Alain Chartier a predecessor of Chaucer.

the place of his "kindly engendrure," and calls himself a Londoner; notwithstanding which, Leland declares that he was of Oxfordshire * or Berkshire: perhaps because Thomas Chaucer (by some supposed to be a son of the poet), Speaker of the House of Commons in the reign of Henry the Fourth, possessed residences in those two counties—in Berkshire, at Donnington; and in Oxfordshire, at Ewelm: where he was buried, according to the inscription on his tomb, in the year 1414.

The outline of Chaucer's education at Cambridge, Oxford, Paris, and the Inns of Court—which Leland, upon no apparent authority, has given us—has been amplified and particularised

* "Nam quibusdam argumentis adducor ut credam, Isiacam vel Berochansem provinciam illius natale solum fuisse." What these proofs or evidences were, the biographer does not inform us. He makes no mention of Thomas Chaucer, but affirms that the poet left his fortune (which he says was an ample one) to his son Lewis, including his country house at Woodstock. Perhaps, therefore, the reasons which I have adduced in my text, as influencing Leland in his decisions as to the birth-place of Chaucer, are rather those which have induced succeeding biographers to support his opinions. To those who have read the "Testament of Love," I need not observe, that the ample fortune, and the country house at Woodstock, existed only in the imagination of Leland.

by succeeding biographers, especially by the latest, Mr. Godwin *, who seems to have adopted the rhetorical effusion of Leland, chiefly for the purpose of engrafting upon it diffuse digressions on the state of the law and of the universities of the time.

Date of the poet's birth.

On the subject of the æra of Chaucer's birth there is much difference of opinion. The common date to which this event has been assigned, from the time of Speight, is the year 1328. This statement rests on the authority of an inscription † on a tombstone, erected to the poet's memory by one Nicholas Brigham, in the year 1556; accord-

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* See Godwin's Life, vol. i. After some very inconclusive reasoning in support of Leland's statements, he adds, "Let us, however, *conceive* of Chaucer as a student at law;" if the historical digressions of Godwin had been less diffuse, and written in connection with the Canterbury Pilgrims (of which they make no mention), probably the work would have been much improved. The Sergeant-at-Lawe, the Clerk of Oxenforde, &c. would have afforded him a better ground for these discussions, than the imaginary statements of Leland.

† See Weever's Funeral Monuments. The following inscription had been placed on the original tomb by Caxton:

Galfridus Chaucer vates, et fama poesis
Maternæ, hac sacra sum tumulatus humo.

Life by Leland, or Dibdin's Typ. Ant. vol. i. article Caxton's Boethius.

ing to which, he died in 1400, aged 72. What the authority may have been for this statement does not appear; and it is remarkable that Leland *, who wrote before the tombstone was erected, seems to imply a later date; while all the subsequent authorities on this subject have followed Speight † in adopting the testimony of Brigham's inscription. The only real evidence on the date of Chaucer's birth leads us to a date between that of the tombstone and that implied by Leland.

In the year 1386, according to a document ‡ now extant in the Heralds' College, Geffray Chaucer deposed, on oath, that he was forty years old and upwards, and had borne arms for twenty-seven years. This, taken literally, would place his

* Leland states that Chaucer was highly in favour (commendatissimus) with Henry V. who did not accede to the throne till 1413. This, perhaps, is not incompatible with the birth of the poet, in 1328; but he also places his *education in France*, in the latter years of Richard II.

† Speight's edition of Chaucer appeared in 1597.

‡ This is a deposition on the part of Chaucer, and other persons of consequence, to the truth of certain statements, affecting a dispute between Sir Richard Grosvenour and Sir Richard le Scrope, concerning their arms.

birth about 1345; though Mr. Turner thinks that the vagueness of the expression will allow of our removing the date five or six years earlier. In the widest possible sense, however, it must be understood to mean that Chaucer, in 1386, was not yet fifty years old; and perhaps, should the fixed dates of the poet's life not be at variance with the more literal sense of these passages, it would be more reasonable to receive it.

The deposition upon which this date is grounded, which may be found at length in Mr. Godwin's * Appendix, was unfortunately not examined by him till his work was already in the press: when, being unwilling to disturb those portions of the life which would have been affected by this new evidence, he was tempted to take the less ingenuous course of arguing against it. With this object, he complains that it would totally overthrow *the received statements of all the biographers* respecting the education of Chaucer at Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris; and concludes by the absurd and uncharitable supposition that the poet, from a motive of

* Life of Chaucer, vol. iv. oct. edit.

vanity, was induced to state, on oath, that he was about forty, when in truth he was fifty-eight.

With regard to the rank of Chaucer's parents nothing is known; but it may be inferred, from expressions used in the "Testament of Love *," that he had no other fortune than such as was derived to him from his state appointments or allowances. It appears from his describing himself, in the Court of Love, under the character of "Philogenet of Cambridge, clerk," that he was a scholar at that university. This does not, by any means (as Tyrwhitt seems to suppose), prove that he was not also at Oxford, since it was a common practice of his day to visit, as a place of education, more than one university. On the other hand, there is no evidence to render it certain that he was a scholar in the latter university; the intimate acquaintance with Oxford, which he shows in his

* See historical observations on the Canterbury Tales. The story of Chaucer's having been fined by the Society of the Temple, for beating a friar in Fleet-street, mentioned by Speight, on the verbal authority of one Buckley, who declared he had seen the entry, is rendered very improbable; first, by the circumstance that the Temple did not become a residence of lawyers till after the eighteenth of Edward III. (see Herbert's Ant. of Inns of Court); and secondly, because during the rebellion of Wat Tyler, the records of the Society perished.

Clerk's character, and in the Miller's Tale, is no more than he might have acquired from occasional visits to his friends Wickliffe and Strode.

His principal state appointments.

The first court appointment of Chaucer was in 1367, when he became *valettus* to Edward the Third, with an annual pension of twenty marks.

In 1372 he was appointed, with two others, Envoy to Genoa, by the title of *scutifer noster;* it was on this occasion, in all probability *, that he obtained from Petrarch, at Padua, that translation of Bocaccio's patient Griselde, which, as he himself informs us, afforded the original of his Clerk's Tale. Tyrwhitt, who, in the instance of this tale, as also in that of the "Troilus and Cresseide," seems unwilling to receive the author's own testimony as to his originals, wishes to imply that, because Petrarch omitted all mention of a visit from a minister of the king of England, that visit did not take place. But, if we suppose that the letter to Bocaccio on the subject of the translation was written previously to the interview with Chaucer, it is not very likely that the Italian poet

* See Guinguené, Hist. Lit. vol. iii. p. 110.

would have found an opportunity of noticing the visit afterwards, since he died in the July of the following year. In 1374, Chaucer was appointed to the office of comptroller of the custom of wools in the port of London; and, in the last year of Edward the Third, he was, according to Froissart*, sent to France with Sir Guichard D'Angle and Richard Stan (or Sturry), to treat of a marriage between Richard the Prince of Wales and a daughter of the French King. It was, perhaps, on this occasion that he saw (as he deposes in the document at the Heralds' College) the arms of Sir Richard Scrope, at Rottes in France.

In the 13th of Richard the Second he was appointed clerk of the works at Westminster, and in the following year at Windsor.

The date of Chaucer's marriage with Philippa Rouet, is probably to be fixed about 1380; since the "Astrolabe," which contains the date of an observation in 1391, mentions his son Lewis as a boy of ten years old; and we have no substantial reason to believe that he had any older children. That

* V. i. ch. 325.

his marriage took place subsequently to 1370 is certain, since his wife is mentioned in that year, by her maiden name, as one of the *domicellæ* to Queen Philippa. According to the chronology established by the deposition, Chaucer, in 1380, would be 35 years old; according to the common chronology he would be 52. His wife's sister, who was first married to Sir John Swinford, was, as is well known, first the mistress, and ultimately the wife of the Duke of Lancaster *.

Chronology of his works.

There is hardly one of Chaucer's works the date of which it is possible to fix with precision. Judging from internal evidence, the "Romaunt of the Rose," and the prose translation of Boethius, would be amongst his earliest performances: and, indeed, it is highly probable that his first attempts in literature were translations. In the prologue to the "Legende of Good Women," he refers to a translation of Origen † on the Magdalen as a very early

* John of Gaunt was three times married; first, to Blanche, mother of Henry IV.; secondly, to Constance of Castile; thirdly, to Lady Swinford. Mention occurs of Catherine Swinford, as mistress of the Duke of Lancaster, as early as the fiftieth year of Edward III. But the marriage did not take place till the thirteenth of Richard II.—Dugdale's *Bar.* vol. p. ii. 114.

† The "Lamentation of the Magdeleine," printed in Urry's edition

work. In the Man of Lawe's prologue he mentions a translation of the Ceyx and Alcyone of Ovid as made in his youth. The Legende of St. Cecile (a literal translation), and the Palamon and Arcite, both afterwards embodied in the Canterbury Tales as the Nonne's and the Knight's Tale, are also enumerated in the prologue to the Legende.

The Death of the Dutchesse Blanche, must have been composed subsequently to 1369, since in that year the duchess died. According to Mr. Turner *, this poem is referred to in the Man of Lawe's prologue under the title of Ceyx and Alcyone; but this is scarcely credible, since, in the prologue to the Legende, the poet expressly ranks amongst his works "the Death of Blanche the Duchesse," which can refer to no other poem than the one in question; and it is not very probable that Chaucer should designate this poem

of Chaucer, is clearly not a genuine work of the poet. The adoption of it amongst the poems of our author, seems to have arisen from the following expression in Leland's Life: "tum etiam *Origenis de Magdalena* opusculum transtulisse: quod ego (si modo Origines tale quidquam scripsit) idem esse arbitror cum *Lamentatione Magdalenæ* de qua superius in syllabo mentionem feci."

* Hist. of England, vol. v.

under two distinct titles. Still more strange is the assertion of Francis Thynne, in his animadversions on Speight's edition of our poet, that the true title of this poem is The Dream. Were it not, however, for the express mention of the true title by Chaucer himself, Thynne's argument would be a very perplexing one. It appears that, according to Walsingham's dates, John of Gaunt should have been thirty years old in 1369, the year of Blanche's death; whereas the Mourning Knight in the poem is represented as only twenty-four. The explanation which Thynne gives to the term "white," which is generally understood as intending Blanche, but which he interprets as signifying some mistress of that name, is very degrading to the poem.

It is clear, that if the above chronology of Chaucer's life be correct, the "Parliament of Fowles," and the "Complaint of the Black Knight," the scene and subject of which two poems appear to be very similar, cannot be referred to the courtship of Blanche, whose marriage took place in 1359, when Chaucer would have been but thirteen years old, or, according to Mr. Turner, nineteen. "The

Dream" is by some referred to the same subject. But the precise subject of all these poems * is mere matter of conjecture, though they all refer to the love affairs of some distinguished person.

The "Troilus and Cresseide," is referred by Lydgate to Chaucer's youth: and in one of the concluding stanzas it is addressed to Gower and Strode; the latter † of whom was, as we learn from the "Astrolabe," appointed tutor to young Lewis Chaucer about 1391. The "Legende of Good Women," which mentions most of the foregoing works, is dedicated to the Queen of Richard the

* The Black Knight in the Complaint is, however, clearly the same with the Mourning Knight of the Dutchesse; (compare Black Knight, st. 19, et seq. with Dutchesse, vol. iv. p. 213, Singer's edit.) and it seems highly probable, that John of Gaunt is typified, as well under the character of a King's Son in the Dream, as in that of one of the three rival Tercel-eagles, in the Parliament of Fowles. But it does not by any means follow, that the courtships alluded to in these poems refer to Blanche.

† Mr. Godwin having determined that the date of the Troilus shall be 1350, wishes to prove that the N. Strode of the Astrolabe, is a different person from him to whom the Troilus is dedicated; since, according to his chronology, an interval of more than forty years would intervene between these two works. One Ralph Strode is mentioned by Leland; and this person, he contends, on no evidence, was the "philosophical Strode" with whom the "moral Gower" is coupled in the poem. The Latin postscript to the Astrolabe seems, by the very expression, "*that most excellent philosopher*," Master N. Strode, to identify the two characters.

Second, whose marriage took place in 1382, consequently it dates subsequently to that year. Chaucer's title for this poem, is "The Legende of Cupide."

The House of Fame, is one of those works enumerated in the Legende. Mr. Turner, arguing from an expression in the dialogue between Chaucer and the eagle, assigns this work to the poet's old age; but the expression in question, "For I am old," is in the mouth of the eagle.

The Canterbury Tales are assigned by Tyrwhitt to a date subsequent to the Legende, on the ground that they are not mentioned in the prologue of that poem. The great work of Chaucer, is (unless we suppose that he intended to complete the list of the nineteen ladies of the "Legende") the only work which he has left unfinished: on this ground, as well as because it is from internal evidence the work of a practised scholar and poet, we may conclude that it was his latest * performance of

* The mention of Jack Straw's insurrection in the "Nonne's Priest's Tale," proves that this tale was written subsequently to 1831. The only occasion on which the Canterbury Tales are expressly mentioned in Chaucer's work, is in the suspicious passage called the retractation appended to the Persoune's Tale.

any length or consequence. But the precise ground upon which Tyrwhitt rests his date, is not very conclusive, since the catalogue in the Prologue to the Legende is of works undertaken in the service of Cupid, among which the Canterbury Tales cannot well be classed. The omission of the Court of Love in this list is much more remarkable; and yet it is hardly possible, from internal evidence of style, to suppose this a late work. The expression at the commencement of the poem, "when I was young, at eighteen years of age," proves nothing but that the scene is supposed to take place when the poet was of that age; and even this is most unaccountably contradicted afterwards by the following words, ("what doth this old, thus ferre ystope in yeres,") addressed to the poet by Philobone.

One of the most remarkable passages, with reference to Chaucer's works, is that at the conclusion of the "Confessio Amantis" of Gower, in which Venus directs the author to address our poet in the following words:—

> And grete well Chaucer when ye mete
> As my disciple and my poete:
> For in the flower of his youthe

In sondry wise, as he well couthe
Of dytyes and of songes glade
The which for my sake he made,
The lande fulfilled is over all:
Wherefore to hym in especiall
Above all others I am most holde;
For thy now in his dayes olde
Thow shalt hym tell this message,
That he upon his latter age
Seet an ende of all his werke, [2]
As he whiche is myne own clerke
Do make his Testament of Love, &c.

This passage, which was written some time during the first sixteen years of Richard the Second's reign, contains the only objection of any weight to the adoption of the above chronology of Chaucer's life. If Chaucer was born in 1345, he could not have reached "his dayes olde" before the conclusion of the fourteenth century. Perhaps, however, this expression, which seems opposed to that of "the flower of his youthe," may merely mean that the poet was no longer a young man. In this passage the poetical labours of Chaucer's youth seem to be rather contemptuously included under the title of "dytyes and songes:" yet these are the very expressions used by Chaucer himself in The House

of Fame *, when alluding to his poems on the subject of Love: probably †, therefore, Gower, who adds, that with those poems the land is "fulfilled all over," intended to include all the poems of his contemporary on such subjects, under these titles. It is not impossible that the moral poet may have had some disrespect ‡ for such works as the Troilus and Cresseide, the Dutchesse, or the Parliament of Fowles, in which there is no moral allegory or practical design.

In the Testament of Love (which, like its prototype, the "Consolation" of Boethius, seems to have been composed in prison) we find a recapitulation

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* Book II.

† What adds considerably to this probability, is, that the expressions are used by Venus, who addresses Chaucer as her "disciple and her poete."

‡ The language of the address to Chaucer is, however, courteous; the omission of it in a subsequent edition of his poem, which Gower put forth in the reign of Henry IV., has induced Tyrwhitt to suspect that some misunderstanding had, in the meantime, arisen between the two poets: and in this suspicion he is confirmed by some disrespectful allusions to the subjects of two of Gower's Tales (Canace and Apollonius of Tyre) in "The Man of Lawe's Prologue." This is something like the supposed aspersions of Ben Jonson upon Shakspeare; "the tales and tempests, and such-like drolleries." I cannot help thinking that, although the allusions are in both cases clear, there is more in them of playfulness than of malice.

of various imprisonments and political troubles which at different times happened to the poet. In one passage he refers to a period when he was "first time imprisoned;" and again, "In my youth (he says) I was drawn in to be assenting, and in my might helping, to certain conjurations, and other great matters of ruling of citizens*, and these things have been my drawers in and exciters to the matters, so painted and coloured, that at first to me seemed then noble and glorious to all the people." The consequence of this he represents to be that, "for richesse he has now poverty," and that he is "bereafte out of the dignity of office;" that he is "despised and fullich hated," and that the smooth-tongued flatterers who used to salute him reverently, now do not deign to look at him. In "The House of Fame," though at the time of composing that poem he was still in office †,

* This is generally understood as referring to the election of John of Northampton, as Mayor of London, through the influence of the Duke of Lancaster, in opposition to the court party. See, however, Turner's England, vol. v. 296, note.

† The "reckenings" mentioned in this poem, are referred by Tyrwhitt to the comptrollership of the custom of wool; by Mr. Turner, to the clerkship of the works at Windsor: they may apply to either, but it is remarkable, that the new style of architecture, which had recently

something of this kind seems to be hinted at; and in the prologue to the Legende, the Queen Alceste, when undertaking his defence, hints that he may have been falsely accused; says that there are losengeours (flatterers) at the Court, and cites Dante to show that Envie,

> He parteth neither night ne day
> Out of the house of Cæsar.

All this, although spoken immediately with reference to the Court of Love, may perhaps have an allegorical meaning as applied to the Court of Richard, to whose Queen, Anne of Bohemia, the poem is addressed. Tyrwhitt refers the cause of the poet's troubles to his connection with the political party of the Duke of Lancaster; and this seems to be hinted at in the Testament in these words, "Of the confederacies maked by my sovereigns, I was but a servant—." It is not unlikely that Chaucer should have applied to Anne,

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been brought into fashion, seems to have much engaged the poet at the time of the composition of this work; the Eagle, while describing to him his solitary and studious evenings, after the hours of office were over, says

> "No tidings commen to thee
> Not of thy very neighbours
> That dwellen almost at thy dores."

as a favourer of the reforming party, to intercede for him with Richard; and, in fact, we find that the monarch, in 1398, granted him protection for two years*.

Literary Pursuits of Chaucer.

In extent and variety of attainment, Chaucer is, perhaps, with reference to his opportunities, inferior to no poet of any age or nation. It was not possible that he should have possessed the Greek scholarship, or even the extent of the Latin acquirements, of Ben Jonson or of Milton. Yet it is very certain that not even these two learned authors evince in their writings either a stronger attachment to elegant literature, or a deeper acquaintance with the abstruse questions of their day, than does our eldest English poet.

In elegant literature, amidst the variety which his translations and citations are continually presenting to us, Virgil, Ovid, Statius, Livy†, and

* This seems to have been rendered necessary by the enmity which the reforming principles of the poet had excited against him. The same kind of protection was granted by Richard, in 1392, to Dr. Hereford, one of the most zealous adherents of Wickliffe.—*Lewis's Life of Wickliffe*, p. 261.

† In the first book of the "House of Fame," there is a review of the principal scenes of the Æneid. The Ceyx and Alcione of Ovid, is translated in the opening lines of "The Dutchesse," and is, in fact, the

Dante, appear to have been his favourite authors. To the Italian works of Bocaccio *, our poet seems to have been less addicted than has been generally supposed; since it is plain from his own authority that he was indebted to that author for the originals, neither of his Troilus and Cresseide †,

romaunce which the poet calls for to "drive the night away." The Cave of Morpheus, in the same poem, is based upon the description of Ovid, Met. b. xi. The "Legende of Good Women," also, shows an intimate acquaintance with that poet. Statius is followed in "The Knight's Tale," and in "The False Arcite." Livy is closely imitated in "The Doctour's Tale." Dante is translated in "The Monk's Tale," cited in the prologue to the "Legende," v. 360, compared with Virgil, in "Friar's Tale," v. 260; and closely imitated in the introduction to "The Parliament of Fowles." See especially the inscription over the Park-gate. Scipio enacts the part of Virgil in the "Inferno," as conductor of the poet. But the most convincing proof of our poet's attention to the Works of Dante, is afforded in the "Nonne's Tale," (Cant. Tales, l. 15504) where three stanzas are literally translated from the opening of the thirty-third canto of the "Paradiso."

* The Knight's Tale is derived from "The Teseide" of Bocaccio.

† It seems probable, that the "Filostrato" of Bocaccio, and the "Troilus and Cresseide" of Chaucer, were borrowed from some more ancient common source. The Latin of Lollius (an author of whom, however, nothing is known) is mentioned by Chaucer as his original. Bocaccio, in "The Decameron," speaks of the Story of "Troilus and Cresseide," as existing in Greek verse. The professed opinion of Tyrwhitt is, that the poem of Chaucer is borrowed from the "Filostrato;" yet the wide differences admitted by the critic to exist between the two works, will rather lead the reader to an opposite inference. See account of Chaucer's Works, and notes to Cant. Tales, p. 514, 4to. "How Boccace," he adds, "should have acquired the name of 'Lollius,' and the 'Filostrato' the title of 'Trophe,' are points which I

nor of his Clerk's Tale. Petrarch he characterizes very appropriately, as,

> "The laureat poete
> Whose rethorike swete
> Enlumined al Itaille of poetry;"

whereas Dante is judiciously styled by him, "the greate poete of Itaille."

In French literature, nothing existed in the days of Chaucer, which we should now term classical; but the attention of the poet to the most popular French works of his day, is evinced by his translation of the Roman de la Rose, as well as from his borrowing the materials for his Nonne's Priest's, and Frankelein's Tales, from the "Lais" of Marie de France.

From the preceding observations, it will appear that, besides his acquirements in French and Italian, Chaucer was intimately acquainted with all the best Latin classics * procurable in his day.

confess myself unable to explain." The opinion of Guinguené (Hist. Lit. vol. iii. 108) is much more peremptory:—"Chaucer a suivi de point en point l'intrigue et tous les incidents de ce poëme."

* Nor does he appear to have been less acquainted with the mediæval Latin writers on Trojan and other heroic story; all of whom Chaucer enumerates ("House of Fame," l. 3.); and from Lollius, in particular, he professes to derive his "Troilus and Cresseide." These

Previous to the days of Poggio Bracciolini, and the revivers of classical literature, the conventual and other libraries were chiefly filled with the controversial works of the fathers and schoolmen. These were diligently studied in Latin; but Greek was scarcely known.

Amongst the Latin fathers, the works of St. Austin and Tertullian are occasionally alluded to by Chaucer; but it is not always safe to infer his knowledge of an author, from mere allusion to his name. On some of the popular questions of his day, such as those regarding celibacy, or the philosophy of dreams, he seems to have been possessed of two or three text-books, from whence, on various occasions *, he discharges an overwhelming, and generally an unexpected, mass of learning. The catalogue of his Doctour of Physicke's Library, is,

authors were to the poets of Chaucer's and the succeeding age, what the Cyclic poets were to the Athenian tragic dramatists; magazines of rough facts, or rather fictions, from whence they drew materials for their works.

* See Opening of the Merchant's and Nonne's Priest's Tale, Wife of Bathe's prologue, soliloquy of Dorigene in the Frankelein's Tale: all borrowed from a common source—Hieronymus "contra Jovinianum," or John of Salisbury's "Policraticon." His translation of Juvenal's line, "coram vacuus cantat latrone viator," and his frequent citations from Seneca, are, probably, at second-hand.

probably, derived from some source of this kind, though it contains the name of one author *, who may be regarded as contemporary with Chaucer. On the two questions above alluded to, Macrobius's Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis of Cicero, was his chief authority for the philosophy of dreams; as was a treatise of St. Jerome, on the topic of the question of celibacy. To this he added a tract, entitled "Epistola Valerii † ad Rufinum De non Ducendâ Uxore;" and, perhaps, a chapter of the "Polycraticon" of John of Salisbury, in which the former treatises are embodied and cited.

The most remarkable lines of Chaucer, on the subject of these and similar treatises, are those describing the comprehensive volume in the possession of Jankin, the fifth husband of the Wife of Bathe.

"He had a book that gladly night and day
For his disport he wolde rede it away:
He cleped it Valerie and Theophrast,
And with that book he lough alway ful fast.
And eke ther was a clerk sometime in Rome
A cardinal, that highte Seinte Jerome,

* John of Gatisden, author of the "Rosa Medica," still extant.

† Attributed to Walter Masser, archdeacon of Oxford, chaplain to Henry II., but now printed amongst the Works of St. Jerome.

That made a book against Jovinian,
Which book was ther, and eke Tertullian,
Crisippus*, Trotula†, and Helouis,
That was an abbesse not far fro Paris,
And eke the Paraboles of Salomon:
Ovides art, and bourdes many on;
And alle thise were bounden in o volume."

The title of this extraordinary volume, it will be observed, was "Valerie and Theophrast." Theophrast (by which is meant a treatise cited in a work of St. Jerome, under the title of "liber aureolus Theophrasti de Nuptiis") is also cited in the Merchant's Tale, as a principal text-book on this subject. Valerius and Theophrastus are quoted conjointly by Richard of Bury, when, in his Philobiblon, he inveighs against the interruptions which the fair sex cause to literary pursuits. It would seem, therefore, that some volume was current in the days of Chaucer, under this title, embodying, perhaps, the treatises of Chrysippus or of Trotula, and merely citing or alluding to Tertullian, Ovid, and Solomon.

There can scarcely be any doubt, that on the

* An encomiast of John the Baptist. Tyrwhitt conjectures that he may have extended his censure from Herodias to the sex generally.

† In Merton College, Oxford, there is a manuscript, entitled, "Trotula, mulier Saliterne, de passionibus mulierum."

question of celibacy, Chaucer* entertained the opinions of the reformers. What his serious views may have been on the philosophy of dreams, it is not so easy to determine. We have lately been reminded by the most philosophical of all our present distinguished novelists†, that "the philosophy of dreams was one of the desiderata which Lord Bacon left as a legacy for posterity to unravel." A belief, therefore, in their prophetic influence, would hardly be accounted a weakness in the age of Chaucer. On the whole, however, the subject seems chiefly to have been viewed by him as a part of his poetical machinery. In the opening of the House of Fame, it is seriously treated; in the Nonne's Priest's Tale, suitably to the style of that poem, jocosely; yet this is no proof of his scepticism on this subject. In the Wife of Bathe's Prologue, the influence of the stars is treated with great levity; yet it is plain from the "Conclusions of the Astrolabie," that the author of that treatise was a genuine believer in astrology. We should recol-

* See the lines addressed to Master Bukton, appended to "The Dutchesse."

† Human Life, vol. i. 177.

lect, however, that although the science of astrology was especially applied to the profession of medicine, it was also an ordinary accomplishment of the educated classes in the days of our poet. The treatise above alluded to, is addressed to his son Lewis, a youth of ten years of age; and professes to give him some of the necessary elements of a general education. The frankelein, in the Canterbury Pilgrimage, when describing his lack of learning, with all the honesty of an English country gentleman, tells us that he knows no terms of astrology.

Generally speaking, a freedom from credulity and superstition, is one of the most striking characteristics of Chaucer: and this not only on religious topics. His satire is not confined to the priestly absolution of the friar, or to the pardoner's relics. In the Chanon's Yeoman's Tale, he appears to have departed from the original plan of his great work, in order not to leave so gross a fraud as that of alchemy* untouched. From that

* In the year 1405, an act was passed which made it "felonie to multiplie gold and silver or use the art of multiplication." If we may believe that Chaucer's life was extended beyond that year, it will

tale it would appear that he had given an almost professional attention to the terms of the art, in order that, like the authors of the comedy of the "Alchemist," and of "Hudibras," he might satirize it the more effectually.

The attention of Chaucer to moral science, and to the opinions of moral philosophers, is proved by his translation of Boethius. With regard to natural science, his "Astrolabie" gives some proof of his knowledge of the heavenly bodies; and in his "House of Fame" the philosophy of sound, enters largely into his dialogue with the eagle who bears him aloft*.

The general inference from the preceding remarks will be, that, considering the numerous public stations which our poet filled—(one of which implied a knowledge of architecture, another of commerce, and all a general acuteness, as well as integrity, in business)—considering the bulk of his own works, translations as well as

not appear improbable that he should have inserted this digression from his original plan, in accordance with the general feeling of the nation on the subject.

* The composition also of the different pillars, displays his chemical knowledge.

originals—considering, also, the rarity and dearness of books in his age—the extent and variety of his literary and philosophical attainments were not a little extraordinary.

That such attainments were not acquired without labour, we learn from the "House of Fame *," where he informs us that, when the hours of business were over, he retired to study, and that his "look was dazed †," and his head ached with nightly toil. Amongst the various passages in which he speaks of his habits of close study, the following lines, from the prologue to the Legende, show at once his passion for literature, and the modest estimate which he entertained of his own acquirements:—

"But as for me although I can but lite ‡;
On bookes for to rede I me delite,
And to hem geve I faith and ful credence
And in mine harte have hem in reverence
So hertely that there is game none §
That fro my bookes maketh me to gone."

* Book ii.

† His eyes dimmed. ‡ Know but little.

§ In "The Dutchesse," he speaks of reading, as—

"Better play
Than either at chesse or tables.

And in the "Parliament of Fowles" he gives the following as his incentive to literary research :—

"For out of the old feldes as men saithe,
Cometh al this new corne fro yere to yere
And out of the old bookes in good faithe
Cometh al this new science that men lere."

From the address of the host to the poet, in the Canterbury Tales, we may infer that he was of a meditative and absent turn of mind :—

"What man art thou?" quod he,
"Thou lokest as thou woldest find an hare,
For ever on the ground I see thee stare:
Approche nere and loke up merily.
Now ware you, sires, and let this man have place."

"He seemeth 'elvish by his countenance
For unto no wight doth he daliance."

Date of Chaucer's death.

The exact date of Chaucer's death is very uncertain. We know that he was alive in 1399, from the indenture * of a lease of that date, granted to him for fifty-three years, of a tenement in the garden of the priory chapel at Westminster; and we are equally certain that

* Turner's Hist. of Engl. vol. v. 336.

he was dead in 1410, from expressions of John the Chaplain, lamenting his loss. Leland, therefore, is clearly mistaken in extending his life to the reign of Henry the Fifth.

Such are the principal facts with regard to the life of Chaucer, which may be derived either from public documents or from the evidence afforded us by the words of the poet himself. The whole amounts to little more than a meagre —and, in itself, perhaps, an uninteresting—abstract of facts. Viewed, however, in connexion with the works of our author, these facts may prove of value, as tending to illustrate his various occupations, and his intellectual character. In the hands of a novelist, the unfounded statements of Leland might form the basis of a very engaging romance, in which the youth and education of Chaucer might be exhibited (like that of Cyrus, by Xenophon) rather with a view of illustrating the character and habits of a nation than of an individual. But the reader who wishes to limit himself strictly to truth must be content, in this instance, as indeed in most others, with a plain and unornamented statement of authenticated fact.

CHAPTER IV.

OBSERVATIONS ON SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL OF CHAUCER'S EARLIER POEMS.

CHAUCER, like Ariosto and Spenser, is essentially a descriptive, rather than a dramatic poet. The action, at least of his original poems, is limited and trifling*; the poet almost always speaks in his own person, and his characters rarely come forward upon the stage†, like those of Homer or Milton, to illustrate their own qualities by their sentiments. But his descriptive powers are of every kind; satirical, pathetic, picturesque;

* As in the Duchesse, the Floure and Leafe, the Parliament of Fowles, and more particularly in the action (if action it can be called), of the Canterbury Tales; namely, the contest of the pilgrims for a supper.

† This observation applies more strictly to the earlier poems now under consideration, with the exception, however, of the Troilus and Cresseide, which is not original. In the Canterbury Tales, more especially in the comic tales, there is often much dramatic effect.

which latter term is not to be confined strictly to rural imagery, but may extend to all description, in which the object of the poet is merely to present a material image, and not to touch upon the human character, either satirically or pathetically.

The most striking instances of the poetical powers of Chaucer, under all the three above-mentioned heads, are certainly to be found in his great work. But, if we take into consideration that of that great work, the general prologue, and the ludicrous tales, are the most original portions, while the serious stories are, without any exceptions, either imitations or translations, perhaps we shall be inclined to admit that the minor or earlier poems of our author, afford the best instances of those of his pathetic or picturesque descriptions which may be strictly called his own. In these poems, the playful satire which, on a general view of Chaucer's works, seems to form the leading characteristic of his mind, scarcely appears at all. It is indeed very probable, that the minute description of the different kinds of birds, or even of

the trees, in the Parliament of Birds*, are instances of that kind of satirical parody, which is more plainly exemplified in the rhyme of "Sir Thopas;" he may, in the one case, intend to ridicule the tedious descriptions, as he does in the other the "drafty rhymings," of his contemporaries; but if we except the latter portion of the "Romaunt of the Rose," which is a strict and a very prosaic translation, there is probably no instance of avowed and intended satire† to be discovered in the early poems of our author.

The "Romaunt of the Rose."

As exemplifying the poetical powers of Chaucer, the "Romaunt of the Rose" can only be cited in those of its allegorical descriptions, which are manifest improvements upon the labours of William of Lorris. The argument of the joint production of this author, and of his continuator John of Meun‡, is probably familiar to every one. It

* So, perhaps, the minute descriptions of the dresses and processions in the "Floure and the Leafe."

† Perhaps the "House of Tydinges," described in the "House of Fame," may form an exception to this rule.

‡ For the proportion due to each of these writers, see Godwin's "Chaucer," vol. ii. 236. The "Discourse of the Old Woman," con-

describes, under the allegory of a rose, which is placed in an almost inaccessible position, and guarded by supernatural powers, the difficulties and dangers experienced by a lover in pursuing and obtaining the object of his affections. Towards the outset of the work, the reader is introduced to a garden inhabited by Mirth, and various other allegorical characters; and on the exterior of the garden walls are painted allegorical figures. Of the painted figures, Sorrow and Hate only are given by Warton; but perhaps the portrait * of Elde, with the accompanying lines on the swift yet stealthy pace of Time, are at least equal in poetical merit. The chief interest, however, of the Romaunt is rather historical than poetical. In literary history it is curious, as a translation of the most popular work † in any modern language previous to the time of Dante; and one which powerfully influenced not only the taste of the

taining a satire upon her sex, is omitted in Chaucer's translation, which is otherwise unfinished and incomplete.

* The passage is given at length in the Appendix to Godwin's "Life of Chaucer."

† Petrarch was one of the first to dissent from this long-established opinion.—Warton, vol. ii. 218.

early poets of Europe in general, but more particularly that of Chaucer himself. The Court of Love is a direct imitation of that part of the Romaunt, in which the God of Love gives instructions to his pupil. The allegorical descriptions of the Romaunt gave a direction, not only to the muse of Chaucer, but even through him to that of Spenser. Lastly, the satire on the clergy, contained in the "Rose," was the progenitor of that of the "Vision of William," of the "Ploughman's Crede," and of the "Canterbury Tales."

Amongst the great variety of allegorical images, contained in that portion of the poem which is translated from William of Lorris, the dress of the maiden "Idleness," the portress of the Garden of Mirth, is worth citing, as describing the costume of the thirteenth century.

Of fine orfrais * had she eke
A chapelet, so semely on
Ne wered never maide upon,
And faire above that chapelet
A rosé garlonde had she set;
She had a gaie mirrour †,
And with a riché gold tressour

* Embroidery in gold.—See Todd's Illustrat. p. 38.

† This circumstance in the description will remind the reader of the

Her head was tressed queintly;
Her sleeves sewed fetously;
And for to keep her hondes faire
Of gloves white she had a paire,
And she had on a coat of grene
Of cloth of Gaunt withouten wene.

The attire of Richesse is also curious, in the same point of view; and in the description of Mirth himself, his shoes are carved with figures (decoped) like those of the Parish Clerk in the Miller's Tale, which were ornamented with Paul's windows. Perhaps it may be as well to observe in this place, that the "Miller's Tale" contains also a description of female attire, yet more minute and interesting than that already cited, namely, the dress of Alison, the carpenter's wife.

But to quit subjects of comparatively trifling

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fashion of a much later day. In the "City Madam" of Massinger, the daughters of Sir John Frugal are introduced with mirrors hanging at their girdles. Gloves were an article of rarity, even in the days of Massinger, as we may learn from the amusing distress of Slender, in the opening of the "Merry Wives of Windsor," and various other passages. It seems, however, from a letter of Peter of Blois, describing the character of Henry the Second, (*Quarterly Review*, No. 116, p. 458,) that it was usual for princes to wear gloves as early as the reign of that monarch; since the Archdeacon of London, speaking of the coarseness of Henry's hands, says he "never puts a glove on except he is hawking."

interest for those which, as exemplifying the mind of a remote age, are more important, we may proceed to the satirical portion of the Romaunt; the original of which was the work of John of Meun.

False-semblaunt, one of the allegorical personages in the army of the God of Love, gives a long account of his life and character. Like Proteus, he says he can assume various shapes; he is Knight or Chastellaine*, Master or Scholar, Canon or Baily, as fancy prompts him; but it is in the character of a Mendicant Friar that he chiefly delights to appear. In this character it is his business to supplant, as a ghostly adviser of the great and wealthy, the parish priests. By the bounty of the rich he is enabled to live without the exercise of that manual labour, which the Monk of the "Canterbury Tales" is described as eschewing, and which St. Austin so strongly recommended to the regular clergy. In the course of the description of his exploits as a Friar, False-semblaunt introduces a notice of two controversial works on

* Wife of a chastellain, or keeper of a castle.

the subject of the mendicant orders. The oldest of these in point of time was the "Evangelium Eternum," written by one Joachim, Abbot of Flora in Calabria, in the eleventh century, which had been explained by the Franciscans as prophetic of the origin and prosperity of their order. In Chaucer, it is called, "The Gospel Perdurable."

> That fro the Holy Ghost is sent
> Well were it worth to be brent,
> Entitled was in such manere,
> This booke, of which I here tell,
> There was no wight in Paris
> Before our Ladie at Parvis†,
> That they ne might the booke buy
> The sentence‡ pleased hem well truly.

The great champions, on the other side of the question, were the Doctors of the Sorbonne, amongst whom William St. Amour was the most conspicuous. The doctrines of his work, "De

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* The work, together with the Commentary of John of Parma, was reluctantly suppressed by Pope Alexander the Fourth, in 1255.

† It seems, from this expression, that books were exposed for sale in the portico of Notre Dame, which, as a resort of business, answered to the Pervyse of Paul's, in London. See observations on the Man of Lawe's character.

‡ The opinions, or conclusions of the work.

Periculis Novissimorum Temporum," have been interwoven by John de Meun in this part of the Romaunt. The chief arguments of this work, as appears from the poem, seem to be levelled against the idleness of the friars with regard to manual labour. False-semblaunt, after mentioning St. Amour, says that he made a booke, wherein he would that

> Iche renied begging
> And lived by my traveiling.

The injunctions of St. Austin on this point, and a law of Justinian against beggars, are quoted in the course of this long narration.

There can scarcely exist any doubt, but that the "Romaunt of the Rose," as well as the translations in general, were the earliest essays of Chaucer, both in prose and verse. This poem, and the prose translation of Boethius, bear strong internal evidence of being juvenile productions. In their respective departments, the originals of these two works were the most popular compositions of Chaucer's age. The translations, therefore, were probably undertaken, as much in compliance with the spirit of the day, as at the suggestion of the

taste of the author himself. Most of the literal or close translations of Chaucer are clearly to be referred to his youth. The "Legend of St. Cecilia," afterwards embodied, without emendation *, in the "Canterbury Tales;" a translation of the "Ceyx and Alcyone," of Ovid, afterwards introduced into the "Duchesse," and a translation of "Origen on the Magdelene," are classed by our author himself as juvenile works†. It is probable, also, that the earliest edition of the "Palamon and Arcite," was a much more literal transcript of the "Teseide" of Bocaccio, than the rifacimento which now appears as the "Knight's Tale." But in the youthful days of Chaucer, the age of translation was scarcely past: with the exception of the "Vision of William‡," and the ballads of Lawrence Minot, there was no metrical composition in English which can be proved original; and in prose, Mandeville, who wrote in 1556 (though original), was the sole author. Chaucer was one

* See Tyrwhitt on the "Nonne's Tale."

† See "Prologue to Legende."

‡ It can scarcely be said that this work (which, as we have seen, was certainly posterior to 1362), was prior to the earliest works of Chaucer

of the very first in English literature to break through the practice of translation, and of close imitation, common to the infancy of all literatures except that of the Greeks. The Roman literature was in all ages, with the exception of the department of descriptive satire, based upon a Greek model; and in the early ages of that literature, the diligent study of Greek authors, which Horace so emphatically recommends, was pursued almost to the exclusion of original compositions. Livius Andronicus *, one of the earliest Latin writers, translated the Odyssey; and the dramas of Terence and Plautus, are either translations or close imitations of Menander, Epicharmus, or other authors of the new Greek comedy.

The "Floure and the Leafe" opens to us a scene which was unknown in the days of William of Lorris and John of Meun. The floral games were instituted in 1324 by Clementina Isaure, Countess of Toulouse: they were celebrated annually in the month of May. "Clementina†," The "Floure and the Leafe."

* Dunlop's Rom. Lit. vol. i. p. 68.

† Sismondi seems to doubt the existence of Clementina and her edict:—"Si la célèbre Clémence Isaure, dont l'éloge est prononcé chaque année dans l'assemblée des Jeux Floraux, et dont la statue, couronnée

says Warton, "published an edict, which assembled all the poets of France in artificial arbours dressed with flowers; and he that produced the best poem was rewarded with a violet of gold. There were, likewise, inferior prizes of flowers made in silver. In the mean time the conquerors were crowned with natural chaplets of their own respective flowers. He who had won a prize three times, was created a Doctor 'en gaye science:' this institution, however fantastic, soon became common through the whole kingdom of France."

Chaucer twice quitted this country on embassies; once to the court of France, and secondly to Genoa. In the course of these expeditions he may have been a witness of the Floral Games. The Lady of the Floure and the Lady of the Leafe, the crowning of the two parties which are attached respectively to the two ladies, and the arbour in which the

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de fleurs, orne leurs fêtes, n'est pas un être imaginaire, elle était apparemment l'ame de ces petites réunions, avant que les magistrats les pussent aperçues, et que le public fût appellé à y concourir. Mais ni les circulaires de la Sobregayer Companhia, ni les registres de la magistrature ne parlent d'elle: et malgré le zèle avec lequel, dans les temps postérieurs, on a cherché à lui attribuer toute la gloire de la fondation des Jeux Floraux, son existence même est problématique." Lit. du Midi, vol. i. p. 233, note. The account, however, which Sismondi in his text gives us of the Floral Games, although more detailed, agrees in the main with that of Warton.

spectator is seated, have all reference to the Floral Games. With this subject is mixed up the mythology * (if it may so be called) of the daisy. The praise and worship of the daisy, contained in the poem before us, as well as in the prologue to the "Legende of Good Women," was one of the affectations of our poet's day, and probably derived to him from Froissart, who, during one year † at least, held office at Edward's court at the same time with Chaucer.

The rural imagery of this poem is enriched with the description of chivalric pageants. Troops of knights and ladies advance; one party of whom do honour to the leaf, and the other to the flower: among the former are the Nine Worthies ‡, the Knights of the Round Table, and the recently installed Knights of the Garter. The whole scene is one of lively motion and gaiety. The noise of

* See prose works of Chaucer, under the head of the "Testament of Love," infrà, p. 210.

† Froissart quitted England in 1368; Chaucer was appointed Valettus in 1367. Froissart is well known as one of the poets of the Daisy. The Bargaret (Bergerette) in praise of that flower, alluded to in this poem, is the title of one of Froissart's songs.

‡ These are enumerated by Caxton in his prologue to the "Morte Arthur" of Sir Thomas Malory, see Burnett's Specimens, vol. i. 249. Of the nine, Alexander, Arthur, and Charlemagne were the most popular heroes of romance.

the thundering trumps, the dance, the tournament, and the gorgeous accoutrements of the array, form a striking and pleasing contrast to the rural and retired tranquillity of the opening scene of the poem, when the spectator (a lady) is seated in an arbour, listening to the songs of the goldfinch and the nightingale*.

Chaucer is a picturesque poet in the narrowest and strictest sense of the term. In the "Dutchesse," the woodland scene in which the mourning knight is discovered, and in the "Parliament of Fowles," the description of the garden, are genuine instances of landscape poetry. The "Complaint of the Black Knight," a poem remarkable for the easy flow of the versification, is distinguished also by the beauty of its rural imagery. In the prologue to the Canterbury Tales, the description of the Reve's† rural dwelling,

* On the "merry note" of the nightingale, see a long dissertation in Mr. Todd's illustrations, on the ancient signification of the word "merry," which, he contends, meant merely "pleasant." Be this as it may, it will hardly explain the expression "singen blithe," which is applied to the melancholy bird in the "Romaunt of the Rose:" nor if the term "merry" still signified "pleasant" in the days of Shakspeare, can Sir Nathaniel's application of it to the song of the Owl, be at all justified. The nightingale, however, preserves a character for sobriety by repairing to the "Lady of the Leafe," while the goldfinch repairs to the "Lady of the Flower."

† His wonning was full fayre upon an hethe,
With grené trees yshadewed was his place.

and that of the poor widow's cottage in the Nonne's Priest's Tale, but more particularly, perhaps, the picturesque description of fairies in the opening of the Wife of Bathe's Tale, show a true and simple taste in landscape scenery. Rural imagery, however, with Chaucer, as indeed generally with the poets of the middle ages and of antiquity*, forms but a background to the picture. Landscape painting and landscape poetry, that is, poetry of which the prominent subject is landscape, is of modern growth; there is no Thomson, Cowper, or Delille, previous to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The term picturesque may, however, in poetry, be extended generally to the description of external nature, as opposed to that of moral qualities. The poet may be said to be picturesque, when his object is, not to unfold the heart of man, but merely to present an image or picture; and this,

* In the similes of the Iliad, as also in the shield of Achilles, there is much rural imagery. The prize-goblet of Theocritus may be compared in this respect to the shield in the Iliad. Pastoral poetry and Georgics necessarily include allusions to rural scenes. In the "Philoctetes" of Sophocles, as also in the Choruses of the "Œdipus Coloneus," there is much that is rural.

not merely when the imitation is of objects natural and real, but even when the poet is at once the creator of the original, and the portrayer of the resemblance. Dante is not less a picturesque poet, because the scene of his Commedia is removed from the visible world to one of his own creation. Amongst the more modern names, Ariosto and Spenser, who both wander into all the extravagances of romantic fiction, are for ever picturesque poets.

Perhaps, however, fewer of these extravagant images, than may be commonly supposed, are to be attributed to the invention of poets. It has been observed of Spenser, that the originals of many of his allegorical monsters may be found in the pageants of his day: the poet described what he actually saw. This, it should seem, is the true source of minuteness and detail in picturesque allegory; and hence the reason why the ancient poets, as Homer, in his description of Strife, Terror, &c.; Virgil, in his celebrated image of Fame; Statius, in the description of the temples of Mars and Venus, are so vague and general in their allegorical figures, when compared

with the poets of the middle ages. This may be strikingly exemplified by a comparison of the passages in Statius, with the manifest improvement* upon them in the "Knight's Tale" of Chaucer. The English poet was assisted to details, by painted representations which he had observed, or had seen described, and which in his day frequently formed the interior decoration† of public edifices.

The "Troilus and Cresseide," a poem in five books, has been in all ages, notwithstanding its prolixity, a general favourite: indeed, with all its want of incident and of characters, it contains descriptive passages of great beauty, particularly of the pathetic kind. It is assigned by Lydgate to Chaucer's youth: and it is dedicated, with all the diffidence of a young pupil, to the moral Gower and the philosophical Strode. The tale is founded on an invention of the mediæval writers on Trojan story; and the work of Chaucer is, as he expressly tells us, translated from the Latin of Lollius, one

The "Troilus and Cresseide."

* See Warton, vol. ii.

† Whenever Chaucer describes a gorgeous or luxurious edifice, it is, as in the "Dutchesse," "well depainted and yglazed." See the "Court of Love," and the "House of Fame."

of these writers*. Among the most descriptive passages of this poem, is that portraying the sudden and humbling effect which the sight of Cresseide has upon the libertine Troilus; but the passage is too long for insertion. The following lines, from the introduction to the second book, afford an example of that kind of exordium which forms one of the charms of Spenser and Ariosto:—

O blisful light, of which the bemes clere
Adorneth al the thirdé heaven faire,
O sonnes lefe†, O Jove's daughter dere,
Pleasaunce of love, O goodly debonaire,
In gentle hearts aye ready to repaire,
O very cause of heale and of gladnesse
‡ Yheried be thy might and thy goodnesse.

In Heaven and Hell, in earth and saltè see
Is felt thy might, if that I well discerne,
As man and beast, fish, herbe, and grené tree
They fele in timés with vapour eterne:
God loveth, and to lové woll naught werne§,

* In the "House of Fame," they are placed together on the same pillar with Homer; namely Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido of Columpna, and Geoffroy of Monmouth. On the obscure subject of the original of Chaucer's "Troilus and Cresseide," see note in the remarks on the biography of Chaucer; also Douce's Illust. of Shakspeare, vol. ii. 65.

† Pleasant, delightful. ‡ Hallowed. § Refuse.

And in this world no lives creature
Withouten love is worth, or may endure.

So also the introduction to the fourth book.

But al too little weleway the while *
Lasteth such joy, ythonked bee Fortune,
That seemest truest, whan she woll begile,
And can to foolés her songé entune,
That she hem hent, that blent† traitor commune
And whan a wight is from her whele ythron
Than laugheth she, and maketh him the mowe‡.

The style of the "Troilus and Cresseide" differs from that of Chaucer in general§, in the comparative frequency of the similes. In the first book, the comparison of the haughty Troilus smarting under the effect of love, to the pampered Bayard suffering unexpectedly under the lash of the whip, is perhaps rather quaint than highly poetical: but, in the third book, the following similes descriptive of the feelings of the two lovers on their meeting, afford favourable specimens of the pathetic powers of our author.

* Compare "Fairy Queene," b. i. c. viii. st. 1. The resemblance is so striking, that the passage might have been adduced among the imitations of Chaucer discernible in Spenser's works.

† Blind. ‡ Makes mouths at him.

§ See l. 1640 Cant. Tales. See also Manne of Lawe's Tale, l. 5065.

And as the newe abashed nightingale
That stinteth first, when she beginneth sing,
Whan that she heareth any heerdés * tale
Or in the hedges any wight sterring,
And after † sicker doth her voice outring:
Right so Cresseide, whan that her dredé stent,
Opened her herte, and told him her entent.

And right as he that seeth his death yshapen,
And dien ‡ mote, in aught that he may gesse,
And sodainly rescuous § doth hem escapen,
And from his death is brought in sickernesse,
For all this world, in soche presént gladnesse,
Was Troilus, and hath his lady swete;
With worsé hap God let us never mete.

In the fourth book, Troilus, bereft of Cresseide, is compared to a tree stripped of its leaves :—

And as in winter, leaves ben biraft
Ech after other, till treés be bare,
So that there n' is but barke and branch ylaft,
Lithe Troilus, beraft of ech welfare,
Ybounden in the blacké barke of care,
Disposed wode out of his witte to breide,
So sore him sate the chaunging of Cresseide.

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* "Tale," the reckoning of his flock. As in Milton's "Allegro"—
"Every shepherd tells his tale."

† Securely, fearlessly. ‡ Must.

§ "Rescuous" seems to be used as an adjective, l. 2645 of Cant. Tales. Rescous is synonymous with rescue.

He ust him up, and every dore he shette,
And window eke, and tho this sorrowful man,
Upon his beddes sidé doune him sette,
Full like a dead imagé, pale and wan,
And in his breast the heaped wo began,
Out brust, and he to worken in this wise
In his woodnesse, as I shall you devise.

Right as the wildé bull beginneth spring
Now here, now there, idarted to the herte,
And of his death roseth, in complaining,
Right so gan he about the chamber stert,
Smiting his breast aye with his fistes smert,
His head to the wall, his body to the ground,
Full oft he swapt, himselven to confound.

The "House of Fame," in homeliness of style, and lameness of versification, falls below almost all the poems of Chaucer, while, in grandeur of scenes and images, it rises above them. In this latter respect, as in the unearthliness of the whole subject, it may be compared to the Commedia of Dante: and the bold and rough sketches which it contains are sometimes not much unlike those of the Italian poet. The House of Fame itself, placed on an almost inaccessible rock of ice, is an image of this nature, at once extravagant and sublime.

"The House of Fame."

The description of the House of Tydinges savours rather of satire* than sublimity, and will, perhaps, remind the reader of the union of these two opposite qualities in Ariosto. The aërial flight, also, of the eagle, borrowed as is the idea from the journey of Phaëton, in Ovid, seems to form a sort of prototype to the voyage of Astolpho to the moon on the hippogriff.

The Metamorphoses of Ovid appear to have been the chief source whence the mediæval poets drew their extravagant fictions. Not only is the flight of the poet in this poem borrowed from that author, but the site of the House of Fame itself is, as in Ovid, fixed midway between heaven, earth, and sea. But Ovid was imitated only in the grandeur of his subject, not in the sweetness and polish of his style. The "Roman de la Rose" set an early example of dressing the most imaginative subjects in a homely garb. This practice was followed professedly by Dante, in his Commedia; and Chaucer, who was an admirer of both these works, and a translator of the "Rose,"

* The names on the southern side of the icy rock, which are perpetually melting away from the heat of the sun, is much in the spirit of Ariosto.

has pursued the same practice, in two at least, of his original poems; the "Dream," and the "House of Fame."

The "Legende of Good Women," which more properly might have been entitled * the "Legende of Bad Men;" consists of a series of classical stories, relating the desertion of ladies by their lovers. The object with which this work was undertaken, is explained at length in the prologue, which is, in fact, the most interesting portion of the whole. This prologue curiously unites the imagery of the "Floure and the Leafe," and of the "Court of Love." The poet, while asleep in an arbour, whither he had retired with the intention of rising early to see the daisy ("the flower which I so love and drede") spread its leaves to the sun, has the following dream:— The "Legende of Good Women."

The god of Love, accompanied by his queen, Alcestis, and a train of nineteen ladies, is engaged in celebrating the worship of the daisy. The queen, like the Lady of the Flower in the poem

* Chaucer's title for this work is "The Legende of Cupide." See "Man of Lawe's" prologue; so also Lydgate. The present title seems to have been adopted by the editors from an expression in the prologue—"a glorious legende of good women."

of the "Floure and Leaf," is clothed in green. Next to her hair she wears a fret-work of gold, and above that a crown of white, in imitation of the mixture of colours in the holy flower itself. The poet is so awe-struck by the beauty and magnificence of her appearance, that he composes a ballad in her honour. Presently the nineteen ladies "echon true of love," on discovering the daisy, kneel down and sing a hymn:

> Heale and honour
> To trouth of womanhede and to this flour,
> That beareth our alder-prize in figuring,
> Her white crowne beareth the witnessing.

The poet, presuming to join in the sacred ceremony, is interrupted by the God of Love, before whom he is arraigned (as it were, at a Court of Love *) to answer for his offences.

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* It will be remembered that the Court of Love, in the poem under that title, is described as

> Depeinted wonderly,
> With many thousand daisies rede as rose,
> And white also; this saw I verely.
> But who tho daisies might do signifie.

For information on the subject of the Courts of Love, see Retrospective Review, vol. v. p. 70; also Editor's note to Park's edition of Warton, vol. ii. p. 296, where a reference is given to the principal authorities on this subject.

The god thus addresses him:—

Thou hast translated the "Romaunt of the Rose,"
That is an heresie ageinst my law,
And makest wisé folke fro me withdraw:
And of Cresseide, thou hast said as thé list,
And maketh men to women lessé trist,
That ben as trewe as ever was any stele.

Alceste undertakes the defence of the poet, and in proof of his devotion to the cause of Cupid, cites those "makinges," or poems, which he has composed in his praise.

He made the boke that hight the "House of Fame,"
Eké the "Death of Blanche, the Dutchesse,"
And the "Parliament of Foules," as I gesse;
And al the love of Palamon and Arcite,
Of Thebes, though the storie is knowen lite,
And many an himné for your holy daies,
That highten balades, rondels, virelaies.

The poet follows up this intercession of Alceste, by alleging that, in the "Cresseide," his intent was

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Can I not tell, save that the queene's floure,
Alceste it was, that kept there her sojoure.

Alceste, in both poems, is the Queen of Love, and is identified with the daisy, the emblem of the "trouth of womanhede." Chaucer alludes, towards the conclusion of the poem, to a fable of a metamorphosis of Alceste into a daisy—"a booke" which, the Alceste of this poem tells him, he has in his chest.

to "forthern trouth in love" by holding to view a bad example.

The God of Love is moved by the pleading of his queen, and the contrition of the poet, and forgives him his past offences. Alceste now enjoins the poet, as a penance, to spend the "most partie" of his time

> In making * of a glorious legende
> Of goodé women, maidenés, and wives,
> That weren true in loving all hir lives;
> And tell of false men that hem betraien.

She then directs him to present his book, on her behalf, to the queen, at Eltham or Shene. This last expression fixes the date of the "Legende" as subsequent to the marriage of Richard the Second with Anne of Bohemia, in 1382.

With what poet the mythology of the daisy, and the story of the metamorphosis of Alcestes into that flower, originated, seems difficult to determine; but it was probably derived to Chaucer from Froissart, who, in the year 1367 †, was at the

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* Making is here used technically.

† See St. Palaye's Life of Froissart translated, apud Johnes's Froissart, vol. i. p. xii.

court of Edward the Third, together with our poet. It is very possible, however, that Chaucer may have been acquainted with the works of an older French author, William de Machaut, who wrote a metrical composition on the Lily and the Daisy, some time in the first years of the fourteenth century. One of Machaut's productions was entitled "Le Dit du Lion," which, perhaps, may have been the original of the lost poem of our author *, mentioned either by him or some interpolator of his works, under the title of the "Leon."

It is unfortunate for the general popularity of Chaucer as a poet, that most of his earlier productions should turn chiefly upon the fantastic fashions and opinions of his own day: yet, on this very account, they are doubly interesting to the historian and antiquary. How far Chaucer himself may have regarded the ceremonies of the Courts of Love, of the Floral Games, or of the observance of May-day, as serious or sacred subjects, it is very difficult to determine. The general

* See Retractation appended to "Persoune's Tale," and Tyrwhitt's Canterbury Tales, vol. ii. 515, quarto edit.

CHAPTER V.

HOW FAR, AND IN WHAT SENSE, THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE MAY BE REGARDED AS DRAMATIC—CHARACTERS OF THE PILGRIMS—GENERAL REMARKS ON THE TALES.

Tyrwhitt, in his introductory discourse to the Canterbury Tales, seems to be of opinion that "The Canterbury Pilgrimage," as well as its prototype, the "Decameron" of Bocaccio, might be classed as comedies not intended for the stage. As illustrating the vices and follies of the day, these works are, indeed, a substitute for (what did not in their age exist) the comic drama: but this chiefly when least dramatic, and when most purely descriptive.

As an historical illustration of contemporary vices or absurdities, neither the Decameron, nor any similar work, will bear a comparison with the Canterbury Tales. In the prologue to the Decameron there is very little discrimination,

even of character, and none of profession or class of life. If we are to look for touches of contemporary manners, these must be found chiefly in the tales themselves. The tales, also, of Chaucer abound with this kind of historical interest *; but in the general prologue we find an accurate and varied portraiture of all the stations of middle life in the poet's day. All this, however, is not the drama, but descriptive satire substituted for it. Something, perhaps, of dramatic effect may be discovered in the support and illustration, which the several characters receive from the aptness of the tales put into their mouths; the moment the pilgrim begins to speak he is brought upon the stage, and becomes an actor; yet even here he is not essentially dramatic, but is rather engaged in illustrating the characters and adventures of others, than in opening to view his own life and actions. The Host, who has

* See the characters of Hendy Nicholas, (one totally distinct from that of the "Pilgrim Clerk of Oxenforde,") and of the parish clerk, Absolon, in the "Miller's Tale;" also those of the Clerk Jankin, the Wife of Bathe's fifth husband; that of Perkin Revelour, in the "Coke's Tale;" that of the poor widow (a maner day), in the "Nonne's Priest's Tale;" the alchymist Chanon, &c.

been compared by Warton to the chorus * of the Greek theatre, is, perhaps, the most dramatic personage of the whole train. After a very brief description of his person in the general prologue (l. 573), he is at once brought upon the stage, on which he continues to play the part of president †, or director-general, through the whole performance.

But although in form the Canterbury Tales are opposed to the drama, yet in object and effect they are, as has been observed, a substitute for the comic stage. A parallel for the prologue to the great work of Chaucer ‡ is not to be found in

* Warton seems to have had in view rather the chorus of Greek tragedy, than that of the older comedy. Not only in connecting together the several parts of the piece does the Host resemble the tragic chorus, but in his frank, though friendly, admonitions; though these apply rather to the words than the conduct of those he addresses.

† Our governour,
And of our tales juge and reportour.—L. 814.

Chaucer himself (line 727) may be compared to the old-fashioned comic poets (Aristophanes, Terence, or even Ben Jonson), who occasionally address the audience in their prologues, in vindication of their work. The relation which Chaucer bears to comic dramatists, is remarked by Beaumont, in his letter to Speght. See Testimonies apud Urry's Chaucer, or Speght's edit., 1602. The most strictly dramatic passages of the work will be found in the addresses of the Host to the several pilgrims, and in their prologues.

‡ Barclay's "Shippe of Fooles," in plan and object, though not in literary merit, approaches very nearly to this Prologue.

the whole range of literature, and why? because there never was an age so abounding in matter for comedy, which at the same time was destitute at once of a drama and of descriptive satire. In Greece, especially in the age of the new comedy, when advanced refinement had produced a variety of the ludicrous, the stage exhibited every low and ridiculous character of the day; so that descriptive satire found no place in literature. In Rome, on the contrary, the drama continuing to exhibit Greek manners, descriptive satire, unknown to the Greeks, took upon itself the office of censor. In the present undramatic age this office is executed by novels; the best and most graphic of which (or at least extracts from them) will be to succeeding ages, what the Canterbury Tales are to us.

About the period of the Reformation, those dialogues, in which characters are introduced without connexion or plot *, may be said to

* As the "Four P.'s," and others, attributed to Heywood. See Dodsley's Old Plays. Holofernes, Sir Nathaniel, and Armado, in "Love's Labour Lost," are introduced as failing in an attempt of this kind. The Pardoner is a character in the "Four P.'s," and in many other pieces of this kind. Heywood's Dialogues afford examples

occupy this province in literature, and, perhaps, to form an intermediate step between descriptive satire and the regular comic drama.

In the Elizabethan age much of that kind of descriptive satire, displayed in Chaucer's prologue, may be found in the satirical tracts of Decker, Greene, and Nash. But, with the exception of Barclay's "Shippe of Fooles," the closest approximation to this prologue, in the painting of manners*, is exhibited by the writers on characters, as Bishop Earle, Sir T. Overbury, and the author of Hudibras. The poem of Hudibras itself has more of the historical interest of the Canterbury Tales than almost any other composition either in prose or verse. In the English drama no works so nearly resemble the prologue and tales of Chaucer, in portraying contemporary characters of low and middle life, as "The Alchymist," "Bartholomew Fair," and the two

of the same characters which are exhibited in the Canterbury Tales. See the dialogue between a Knight Merchant and a Plowman, British Bibliographer, vol. ii.

* The characters of Theophrastus are of a more universal stamp, and, although Athenian, belong chiefly to human nature in general. Chaucer illustrates not the follies and vices of man, but the professional characters of his day, and partly what, in Ben Jonson's time, were called the "humours."

plays on the humours of the age, by Ben Jonson; and in one * of these plays the dramatist has assisted the comprehension of the reader by a kind of descriptive prologue. Description, although as poetry, it is inferior to the drama, yet, in an historical point of view, it is at once more complete and more readily comprehended.

What Milton has so pathetically observed of the Squier's Tale, (namely, that it is "left half told,") may be applied to the whole scheme of the "Canterbury Pilgrimage." The action of the poem, if action it may be called, consists in the contest of the pilgrims for the supper to be given on their return, at the general cost, to the most successful novelist; it is projected by the Host, that each Pilgrim shall tell one tale in the way to Canterbury, and another in returning; but the work of Chaucer breaks off before the arrival at Canterbury, and when not even the first tale has gone its entire round†. What the adventures of the Pilgrims

* Every Man out of his Humour.

† Besides the general incompleteness of the whole plan, there are many marks of a want of finish, even in what has reached us. The Knight's yeoman relates no tale; and, as if in requital, a Chanon's yeoman, not one of the original assembly, joins the group unexpectedly

in that town might have been in the hands of Chaucer, may, perhaps, be partly imagined from the prologue to the Merchant's second tale, in which the supposed adventures are related by some anonymous imitator of our poet .

The Pilgrims.

The characters of the pilgrims are strongly painted, for the sake of picturesque contrast. The more worthy characters are raised above their ordinary rank and condition of life; the churls, as the poet himself terms them, are lowered. Thus the Monk is

"A manly man to ben an Abbot able."

The Sergeant-at-Lawe has been a justice of assize. The Frankelein has been lord of session, and knight of the shire. The Clerk of Oxenforde and the Doctor † are both, in their several ways, profound scholars; but the former loves philosophy for its own sake; lean in person, and thread-

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at a small town on the road, and amuses the company with ridiculing the charlatanerie of his master. The city tradesmen also appear only as mutes in the drama. Neither has the Plowman any tale which can be called a genuine work of Chaucer.

* See Warton, vol. ii. 289. Warton supposes the author of the prologue and tale to be a contemporary with Chaucer.

† These characters, as well as that of the Merchant, may, in a moral point of view, be ranked in the upper class of pilgrims, with the Knight and Monk.

bare in dress, he is indifferent to a benefice: his whole soul is in his "twenty bokes," and the little money he has, he spends on books and learning. The Doctor "loved gold in special;" to him the end of science is (with the friendly assistance of his apothecaries) gain. For the sake of possessing gold, he is frugal in his habits: he has not, indeed, the "threadbare overest courtepy" of the scholar—

> In sanguin and in perse he clad was, alle
> Lined with taffeta and sandalle;
> And yet he was but esy of dispence:
> He kepte that he wan in the pestilence.

Gold is the great object of all his learning and labour.

The dignity of the Knight is marked by his having served among those of the Teutonic order, in Prussia, where "he hadde the borde begun," (presided at table), "aboven alle nations;" and, by an attendant yeoman; for, as Mr. Tyrwhitt has justly remarked, the yeoman belongs to him, and not to his son, the Yonge Squier *.

* The character of the "Squier" is chiefly marked by personal beauty and accomplishments, and is, perhaps on that account, a general

The Host, although on familiar terms with the whole party, generally marks his respect * for the more dignified characters, by some appellation or title of courtesy. The Knight is "my maister and my lord," the latter title is applied to the Monk: and it is remarkable, that while the Host himself rather unceremoniously interrupts the poet in his history of Sir Thopas, it is the Knight only who ventures to break in upon the tedious catalogue of the Monk's "tragedies." The Sergeant, again, is "*Sire* Manne of Lawe." The Prioresse, "*Madame* Eglantine," besides many other marks of gentility and good breeding †, is made to speak French; at once a proof of high station, and a characteristic of a religieuse of the day.

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favourite. He has, however, at least one trait characteristic of the times:—

"He carf before his father at the table."

So also Damian, in the "Merchant's Tale." The yeoman is chiefly distinguished by his bow, and his knowledge of woodcraft.

* Only one of the ladies, the Prioresse, is addressed by the Host, but in the most courteous terms. See Prioress's prologue.—The usual title of courtesy given to a monk was "My Lord," or "Dan." A priest who had not graduated at the University was styled "Sir," as Sir Nathaniel, &c.: the Nonne's priest is "Sir John." One who had graduated was styled "Master."

† At mete was she well ytaughte withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingers in hire sauce depe.

The pilgrims of the higher class, although not all (as, for instance, the Monk and the Frankelein,) of the purest moral stamp, maintain the dignity of their characters, by the gravity and decorum of their tales. It is to their tales (as well as to the Persoune's) that the poet, when about to rehearse the churlish tale of the Miller, warns every "gentil wight" to turne.

> Turne over the leafe and chese another tale,
> For he shall find enough both grete and smale
> Of storial thing, that toucheth gentilesse,
> And eke moralitie and holinesse.

To these respectable characters are contrasted the drunken Miller, and the colericke Reve, who are especially designated as "cherls*," and "many other mo;" in which comprehensive charge we may include another pair of intellectual gladiators, the Somnour and the Frier, as well as the Pardoner,

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Her French is said to be "after the schole of Stratford atte Bowe." The same sort of disparaging expression is used in the "Miller's Tale," in describing the dancing accomplishments of Absolon, the parish clerk:—

> In twenty manere could he trip and dance
> (After the scole of Oxenfordé tho).

* It seems that this term, in Chaucer's day, did not mean simply

the Coke, and perhaps the Shipman, "who of nice conscience took no kepe."

But although these characters are certainly the least reputable amongst the pilgrims, it must be confessed that the spirit of the whole train, or at least of many of its members, is somewhat licentious:

> The monk—yave not of the text a pulled hen,
> Which saith that hunters be not holy men.

In which, and similar opinions, he is fully supported by the courtly poet. The Frankelein was "Epicures' owen son*." The Merchant, indeed, ("souning alway the increase of his winning,") and the Doctour, were rather intent upon amassing gold, than gratifying the sensual appetites: but even the scholar, one of the least worldly of the party, is cha-

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low born, but characters of a low and vulgar stamp. So also villains:

> For villainie maketh villeine,
> And by his deedes a cherl is seene.
>
> *Romaunt of the Rose.*

The churlishness of the Miller is strongly painted in his prologue. In the character of the Knight,

> He never yet no vilanie ne sayde
> In alle his lif unto no maner wight.
> He was a veray parfit gentil knight.

* Wo was his coke, but if his saucé were
Poignant and sharpe, and redy al his gere.

racterised rather by his good words than his deeds —"Souning in moral vertue was his speche;" and the Wife of Bathe, it is to be hoped, was no very favourable specimen either of the morality, or delicacy, of the trading community, in Chaucer's time. As a contrast to the general flippancy and worldliness of the gay train, two characters stand apart from the rest, marked by the plainest and most genuine practical piety—the good Persoune, and his brother the Plowman.

In poverty, in purity, in freedom from worldly ambition, the parish priest forms a strong contrast to the Catholic* clergy of the times. In all these

* This subject is illustrated, more than any where else, in the celebrated "Vision of William," written shortly after 1362, and, therefore, about twenty years before the Canterbury Tales. Under the allegorical character of Dobet (do better), the characteristics of a Lollard parson are portrayed:—

He is low as a lambe, and lovelich of spech,
And helpeth alle men aftir that hem nedith.

From a subsequent expression, "and hath rendrid (translated) the Bible," one would be inclined to suppose Wickliffe himself here intended.

Religion is described, like Chaucer's monk, as "a ridere; a romere bi streetis," (see Warton, vol. ii.); "a postere on palfrey from maner to maner," and attended, "as he were a lord," by "an hep of houndes." The monk, who is frequently termed in Chaucer "lord," gives a still higher proof of his lordly dignity, in the possession of "greihoundes."

qualities, as well as in his generosity, and in the mild yet powerful influence of his preaching, and example, he closely resembles the village preacher of Goldsmith's Deserted Village *; but in stern duty and in active benevolence the portrait of Chaucer has the advantage, while the creation of Goldsmith partakes of the careless good-nature of its author.

It has been imagined that the poet, under the character of the Loller (for so he is called by the Host in the Shipman's prologue,) has portrayed his contemporary, and political associate, Wickliffe, as rector of Lutterworth. It was during the two last years of his life, from 1382-84, that the celebrated reformer, having been expelled from his dignities at Oxford, retired to that parish: and, as the Canterbury Pilgrimage could not well have been brought to its present state till after that date†, it is not improbable that the character

* Cowper in the "Task," and Crabbe in the first book of his "Village," have described the same professional character, but in very different colours.

† The "Nonne's Priest's Tale," since it mentions Jack Straw's rebellion, was certainly subsequent to 1381; but the great work of Chaucer, which he left unfinished, must have occupied him to his latest day—that is, at the earliest, till 1400.

of Wickliffe in his retirement, may have suggested many of the traits given to the Persoune.

> He was also a lerned man, a clerke,
> That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche.

The boldness of rebuke attributed to his character, seems also to savour of Wickliffe—

> But it were any persone obstinat,
> What so he were of highe, or low estat,
> Him wolde he snibben sharply for the nones.

In most other respects, and perhaps even in these, the general character of the reforming parsons of the day, (possibly even of Wickliffe's "poor priests *," although unbeneficed,) might have afforded hints for the assemblage of qualities not often found so beautifully marked and united in nature, as in the picture of our poet†.

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* See Le Bas' Life of Wickliffe, ch. x.

† But riche he was of holy thought and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
His parishens devoutely wolde he teche.
Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,
And in adversite ful patient:
And swiche he was yproved often sithes,
Ful loth were him to cursen for his tithes,
But rather wolde he geven out of doute
Unto his pouré parishens aboute,

It would be an amusing speculation to search among the few friends or acquaintance of Chaucer, whose names have come down to us, for the possible originals of some of the Canterbury Pilgrims. Was the Parish Priest, Wickliffe? or the Clerke of Oxenforde, the philosophical Strode? Was Harry Bailey, the Host, a real character? A name seems to stamp him with individuality. But if there is any thing in a name, did Osewold the Reve ever enjoy his picturesque rural dwelling*, and

> Ride his right good stot,
> That was a pomelee grey, and *highte Scot.*

And did the poet, in this instance, as well as in that of Huberd the Friar, indulge in the personal satire of the older Greek comedy? All that can be offered in answer to such questions is, that

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Of his offring, and eke of his substance.
He coulde in litel thing have suffisance;
Wide was his parish, and houses fer asonder,
But he ne left nought for no rain ne thonder.
In sikenesse and in mischief to visite
The ferrest in his parish, moche and lite,
Upon his fete, and in his hand a staff.

* His wonning was ful fayre upon an hethe,
With grené trees yshadewed was the place.

there is in many of the characters, as well those of the prologue as those described in the tales, an individuality *, which renders it highly probable that they were drawn from the life.

In remarking upon the Persoune's character, it may be as well to observe upon the inconsistency of uniting a Lollard, an avowed despiser of pilgrimages †, with a gay train of Catholic devotees. In his prologue, the Priest speaks in the spirit of the Puritans of a later day.

I wol you tell a litel tale in prose
To knitte up all this feste, and make an ende,
And Jesu for his grace wit me sende,

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* The personal defect of Roger, the Coke, if an invention, is certainly a very strange one. The domestic circumstances of the Pilgrims—namely, the uneasy yoke of wedlock under which the Merchant and the Host are suffering (see the Merchant's and Squier's prologue); the spendthrift son of the Frankelein, and the two months which have just elapsed since the Merchant's marriage, seem to give a more than poetical reality to these characters. It is worthy of remark, that Alison is the name as well of the carpenter's wife in the Miller's Tale, who kept lodgings in Oxford, ("gestes helde to borde,") as of the Wife of Bathe's gossip, with whom her fifth husband, Jankin, a clerk of Oxford, boarded.

† See the oath given in Mr. Turner's England, vol. v. 196, as extorted, in 1396, from those suspected of Lollardism. The "Persoune" is probably included among the pilgrims with a view of illustrating the character of a Lollard priest.

To shewen you the way in this viage
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage,
That hight Jerusalem celestial.

And a little before, when requested by the Host to tell a fable—

This person him answered al at once,
Thou getest fable non ytold for me,
For Poule, that writeth unto Timothe,
Repreveth hem that weiven * sothfastnesse
And tellen fables, and swiche wretchednesse.

The sermon which follows may, perhaps, have been one of Wickliffe's. Mr. Tyrwhitt is inclined to believe it a translation of a Latin treatise; since it is entitled in some manuscripts, "tractatus de pœnitentiâ."

Rank of the Ploughman.

The term ploughman did not bear in the days of Chaucer exactly the signification it does at present. In the Statute of Labourers, passed in the year 1350 †, the following classes are enumerated:—carters, ploughmen, plough-drivers, shep-

* Depart from.

† Soon after, and in consequence of, the great plague, which, I believe, raged most in England in the year 1349. The scarcity of hands, owing to the diminution of the population, caused an absurd law enforcing labour, of which it regulated the wages, as well as also the price of provisions.—Eden's Poor, vol. i. 31.

herds, swineherds, and deyes: of these, it seems that the two first, carters and ploughmen, were not merely labourers, but also men of some little capital. In the "Parliament of Fowles," the expression, "the carter dremeth how his cartes gone," seems to imply that the cartes were his own property. But the Ploughman of Chaucer, the brother of the Persoune, paid tithes; and the very fact of his engaging in the gay expedition, riding on his own mare *, shows that he was an independent man. He answers, therefore, rather to the small renting farmer of our days than to the labourer; the chief difference being, that he paid his rent in occasional service † instead of money,

* It appears, however, that labourers were in the habit of going on pilgrimages, since the Statute of Labourers in 1388 forbids their departing, except under certain regulations.—Fosbroke, Brit. Mon. p. 475.

See the character of the ploughman in the poem called the "Ploughman's Tale," and in another composition also, published in Urry's edition, called "Jack Upland." The poorer tenantry inhabited the hill, or poorer country. The term "ploughman" continued to be used in the higher sense as late as the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., as appears from a play attributed to John Heywood, apud British Bibliographer, vol. iv. 270. The ploughman is perhaps made brother to the parson, because that class being particularly obnoxious to the impositions of the mendicant friars, were befriended by the reforming priests.

† For the nature of these services, see Eden's State of the Poor,

and cultivated his farm chiefly with the assistance of his family, or with a very few of the lower classes of labourers entirely dependent upon him, and perhaps making a part of his family.

Of the labouring classes the dey was the lowest of all. The following passage from the "Troilus and Cresseide" leads one to suppose, that the term was connected with what had been the principal cause of slavery in all ages, namely, the capture of prisoners in war:

> The wrath
> Of Troilus the Greekes boughten dere,
> For thousandés his hondes maden dey.

The "poure widewe," the owner of the celebrated "Chaunticlere" in the "Nonne's Priest's Tale," is described, "as it were a maner dey;" but this is merely a metaphorical expression, and illustrative of her low station in life. Her "catel" and her "rente" class her with the ploughman who

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vol. i. p. 12. The distinction between him and the "villein" of the preceding age was, that on the performance of these services, the possession of his farm was legally secured to him by a copy of court roll, and that he enjoyed liberty of person. See Hallam's "Middle Ages," vol. iii. 261, from whence it appears that the reign of Edward the Third was a period of transition from villainage to copyhold rights. See also Eden's Poor, vol. i. p. 12. 30.

Tithes paied ful fayre and wel,
Both of his proper swinke and his catel.

State of the Universities.

The universities, in the days of Chaucer, were not usually resorted to by the sons of the nobility, who were educated privately in the houses of the clergy of the higher rank*. Poverty is one of the characteristics of the Clerke of Oxenforde; and the two "poure scholeres" of Cambridge† in the Reve's Tale, with their broad north-country dialect, may be regarded as specimens of a large class among the scholars of both universities. Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh, speaking at Avignon before Pope Innocent VI., in 1357, attributes a recent decline in the number of the Oxford scholars to the friars, who made a practice of enticing young

* Becket's house, as described in Hume's England, is an early instance of this private mode of education. The Inns of Court were also places of education for the young nobility, where, according to Sir John Fortescue, dancing, singing, playing on instruments, and courtly exercises, formed as favourite branches of education as the study of the law.

† "Poure" seems an inseparable epithet from "scolere." In the Friar's character—

For ther was he not like a cloisterere,
With thredbare cope, as is a poure scholere.—L. 561.

So also Hendy Nicholas is called "a poure scholere." See Miller's Tale, line 4.

scholars into their orders*. The parents preferred keeping them at home in rather a lower sphere of life, as husbandmen, to the risk of losing their services and society for life.

The reduced number, as stated by the Archbishop, amounted to 6,000, whereas in his younger days, it had reached as high as 30,000; and these extraordinary numbers were not peculiar to the English universities, but were exceeded at Paris, and nearly equalled at Prague, where, in the time of John Huss and Jerome, the number of scholars amounted to 5,000. These numbers were chiefly swelled by the swarms of mendicant friars, which at that time infested the universities of Europe. With these and their scholars, as well as with a certain proportion of lay-students, the whole extent of the town or city in which the university existed, was peopled. Comparatively few colleges were founded†, and the scholars resided in halls or lodgings, under the superintendence of some

* In 1366 an act was passed forbidding any friar to receive a scholar under the age of eighteen. This practice of the friars is noticed by Wickliffe. See Burnett's Specimens, vol. i. p. 61.

† At Oxford University College, Merton and Oriel. It is difficult to say what exactly is meant, in the Reve's Tale, by the

Master of Arts. Thus, not being permanently attached to any one university, they frequently changed their residence; and in England, in the days of Chaucer, it seems to have been a common practice* to finish the education at Paris, after having perhaps visited both the national universities.

The learning of the friars was, as is well known, scholastic, and not classical; and a passion for the scholastic philosophy, disseminated by the friars, must be ranked among the chief causes of the then crowded state of the universities. Classical learning was at a very low ebb: very few good Latin

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"Gret college
Men clepe the soler hall at Cantebrege."

In Wood's History of Oxford, I observe the term "soler" used to express a large room where books were placed. The friars had their monasteries both at Cambridge and Oxford.—Warton, vol. ii. 125.

* See Butler's Catholics, vol. i. 54; also Godwin's Chaucer, vol. i. 413. The idea of Godwin, that Chaucer himself is an instance of this practice, is incapable of substantial proof, and rests merely on the inventions of Leland. The poet, however, seems, from his character of the Clerk, as well as from the tales of the Miller and the Reve, to have been locally acquainted with both Oxford and Cambridge. It is to be hoped that the state of academical morals exhibited in these two tales, is not absolutely a true picture of the rival seats of learning and wisdom.

authors, and scarcely any Greek, were known or even possessed, and the libraries* of the day were principally composed of the works of the Latin fathers and of the schoolmen. Among the latter class must be ranked Bacon (who, in the century preceding that of Chaucer, had been mainly instrumental in establishing the scholastic system of education at Oxford), Duns Scotus, and Occham: all these celebrated men were friars, and most of them, as well as other distinguished men of the day†, were of Merton College, in Oxford. But the friar‡ of the Canterbury Tales is a being of a very different class from that of the philosophical inhabitants of the universities; he is distinguished neither by the astrological and alchemical knowledge of Hendy Nicholas, nor by the logic of his fellow pilgrim, to whose taciturnity the merry and gossiping Limitour affords a marked contrast.

The Friar.

* On the state of the University libraries, see Wood's History of Oxford, apud Dibdin's Bibliomania.

† Simon Islip, Archbishop of Canterbury, and William Rede, Bishop of Chichester.

‡ For a full exemplification of the character of a friar of this class, see the Sompnour's Tale.

Of yeddinges* he bare utterly the pris,
And knew wel the tavernes in every toun,
And every hosteler and gay tapstere.

It is observable, that both Nicholas and the friar are distinguished from the clerk, by their musical tastes and talent. Above the "bokes gret and smale," the "astrolabe," and "augrim† stones" of the former, lay the instrument to which the clerk is said to prefer "Aristotle and his philosophie:"

A gay sautrie,
On which he made on nightes melodie,
So swetely, that all the chambre rong;
And "angelus ad Virginem" he song.

The musical performances of the friar, who is altogether a less accomplished man, are less elaborately described:—

And certainly he had a mery note;
Well coude he singe and plaien on a rote.

And it would seem also, from the following lines, that his songs were in English rather than Latin:

* The precise meaning of "yeddinges" is unknown: it probably signifies songs, or story-tellings.

† "Augrim," a corruption of algorithm, the Arabian term for numeration. "Augrim stones;" stones used in numeration. See Warton, vol. ii. p. 260.

Somewhat he lisped for his wantonnesse,
To make his English swete upon his tonge,
And in his harping, when that he had songe,
His eyen twinkled in his hed aright,
As don the sterres in a frosty night.

The Pardoner.

The chief business of the pardoner was, as his name expresses, to sell the pardons or indulgences of the Pope, for which trade he was regularly licenced. But he was also, like the Fra Cipolla of Bocaccio, armed with relics, the exhibition of which he turned to profit:—

His wallet lay beforne him in his lappe,
Bret-ful of pardons come from Rome al hote.

And again:—

But of his craft, fro Berwicke unto Ware,
Ne was their swicke an other pardonere;
For in his male he had a pelwebere*,
Whilk as he saidé, was our Ladie's veil.
He saide he hadde a gobbet† of the seyl
Thatte Seint Peter had, when he went
Upon the see, till Jesu Christ him hent.
He had a crois of laton‡ full of stones,
And in a glasse he hadde pigge's bones.
But with these relikes, whanne that he fond
A poure persone dwelling up on land§,

* The covering of a pillow. † A piece, or bit.
‡ A sort of adulterated metal like brass.
§ In the hill or poorer country, a Jack Upland.

Upon a daie he gat him more moneie,
Than that the persone gat in monethes tweie.

In the Canterbury Pilgrimage, the pardoner is represented as the friend and "compere" of the Somnour, or Summoner to the Ecclesiastical Courts, who, perhaps, ranked next to him in extortion and roguery. So acknowledged an impostor was the pardoner, that in the first years of the Reformation we find him satirized by a zealous papist, and an intimate friend of Sir Thomas More. John Heywood, one of the very oldest of our dramatists (if, indeed, he can justly claim that title), introduces the pardoner in his play, called the "Four P.'s," as also in another dialogue of the same kind, between a pardoner, a friar, a curat, and neighbour Pratte.

In the former of these two pieces, in which he is associated with a palmer, a potecary, and a pedlar, he decries pilgrimages as a laborious and expensive mode of going to heaven.

I say yet agayne my pardons are suche
That yf there were a thousand soules on an hepe,
I wold bring them to heaven as good chepe*

* A bon marché; chepe being an old word for market.

As ye have brought yourself on pylgrymage,
In the least quarter of your vyage.
With smalé cost and without any payne,
These pardons bring them to heven playne;
Give me but a peny or two pens,
And assone as the soule departeth hens,
In halfe an houre, or thre-quarters at the moste,
The soule is in heven with the Holy Ghost.

A contemporary of Heywood, but of a very different religious persuasion, was Sir David Lyndesay, who, in his "Satyre of the Three Estaites," puts the following words into the mouth of a pardoner:—

I am schir Robert Rome-raker,
Ane perfyte publik pardoner,
Admittit by the Pape:
Sirs, I sall shaw you, for my wage,
My pardons, and my pilgramage,
Quhilk ye sall se, and grape*.
I give to the devill with gude intent
This unsell† wickit New Testament,
With thame that it translaitit:
Sen layik men knew the veritie,
Pardoners getis no charitie,
Without that they debait it‡.

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* Grope, feel. † Evil.
‡ Chalmers's Lyndesay, vol. ii. p. 10.

After venting his indignation against Martin Luther, Bullinger, Melancthon, and even Saint Paul, Lyndesay's Pardoner proceeds to detail his wares, which are well calculated to win the heart of a Scotchman, such as the jawbone of Fin-Mac-Coul, or Fingal, and the rope which hung Johnny Armstrong.

The Sergeant-at-Law has little in his character that is obsolete, except his practice of frequenting the Parvis. The general signification of this word is the portico of a church; as here applied, it means, in all probability, what Dugdale calls the Pervyse (portico) of Paul's. In Dugdale's time, as we know from the contemporary authority of Ben Jonson and Bishop Earle, not only the steps*, but even the aisles of Paul's church, were the common resort of sharpers and idle loungers of all descriptions. In the days of Chaucer, perhaps, the visitors were confined to rather a higher grade, who resorted there for business only; nor was the sanctuary itself, as it appears, as yet invaded.

The Frankelein is scarcely yet extinct, except in

* See the scene in the middle aisle of Paul's, in "Every Man out of his Humour," and Bishop Earle's character of a Paul's man.

name. In fortune, station in society, character, and habits, he corresponds to the general mass of the provincial country gentlemen of this day. He is the St. Julian* of his neighbourhood, and he takes pains to tell us that he is a borel or unlettered man, who knows no terms of astrologie†.

The term yeoman, or young man, signifies an attendant; and in that sense it is still used in speaking of the yeomen of the guard. In most languages, the word signifying boy, signifies also servant. Παῖς, puer, knave, or garçon, either are, or were, applied to attendants, without reference to the actual age of the party. Perhaps the origin of this is to be sought for in the patriarchal, the most primitive of all forms of society, in which the youngers waited upon the elders‡.

Pilgrimages. The object of foreign pilgrimages, was sometimes of a superstitious nature, sometimes for the sake of commerce. The pilgrimage to Rome was usually

* The patron saint of hospitality. In Paris there is, or was, a street called Rue St. Julien des Menestriers.

† To be ignorant of astrology in the days of Chaucer was a mark of a deficient education.

‡ A practice common also in feudal times.—In the houses of the great nobility, the youth there educated were required to perform menial services. So the Squier "carf before his fader at the table."

undertaken for the sake of obtaining absolution from the Pope *: that to Jerusalem with the view of visiting the holy sepulchre, or of procuring relics, which might be turned to profitable advantage. The most usual of the foreign pilgrimages are enumerated in the description of the Wife of Bathe's character:—

> Thries hadde she ben at Jerusalem,—
> She hadde passed many a strange streme.
> At Rome she hadde ben, and at Bologne,
> In Galice at Seint James, and at Cologne.

Foreign, as well as provincial pilgrimages, were undertaken as a penance, either for a generally dissolute course of life, or in expiation of some particular crime. But the most common motive for provincial pilgrimages, and especially, perhaps, for that to Canterbury, was the sociability and gaiety of the expedition. In the gay train of the Canterbury Pilgrims, the flaunting Wife of Bathe appears strictly in character. The tales with which the travellers solace the way, and even the

* Fosbroke's Brit. Mon. p. 464. On the Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, see Retrosp. Review, vol. ii. 324, and Mandeville's Travels, p. 88, edit. 1725.

bagpipes of the drunken Miller, are exact representations of the usual practices on those occasions. In an old dialogue, of very nearly contemporary date with the work of Chaucer, it is said, "Some other pilgremis will have with them baggepipes, so that every towne* they come throwe, what with the noyse of their singying, and with the sound of their pepying, and with the jangling of their Canterbury bellis, and with the barking out of doggis after them, that they make more noyse than if the kinge came then away with all his clarions, and many other menstrelles†."

A long list of the English places of pilgrimage is given by the Palmer in the dialogue, by John Heywood‡, above-noticed, and includes not only the shrines of saints, but even holy crosses; as, for instance, those of Waltham and Dagenham, in Essex. An image of the Virgin Mary, at Walsingham, in Norfolk, was much visited; Bury

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* A baggepipe wel coude he blowe and soune,
And therewithal he brought us out of towne.

† Fosbroke, p. 472.

‡ Dodsley's Old Plays: "The Four P's."

St. Edmunds, in the same county; and the shrine of St. Edward, in the Abbey of Gloucester, were frequently resorted to: but in the time of Chaucer, the most usual pilgrimage was that to Canterbury *:

> And specially from every Shire's ende
> Of Englehond to Canterbury they wende.

Inns for the accommodation of pilgrims, as well at the place of their destination as on the route, were very common. In Warton's † day, at Burford, a long room with a series of Gothic windows, which had been the refectory of the travellers on their road to Gloucester, still remained: and at Glastonbury, an inn formerly built by the abbot‡ for the accommodation of pilgrims, and then called the Pilgrim's Inn, still retains many traces of its ancient state.

The structure, therefore, of Chaucer's work is, not only in its outline, but even in many of its details, strictly grounded on fact. As regards the

* In the second week in Lent, Edward the Third, and his mother Isabella, made a pilgrimage there. Anglica Sacra, i. 368.

† History of English Poetry, vol. ii. 232, note.

‡ Warner's "Glastonbury."

prologue and the general plot of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, the skill and judgment of the poet are chiefly shown in the selection, as well as in the nice discrimination of each character, and in the combination of the whole proceedings, under the guidance and direction of the Host. There is probably no previous critic, and scarcely any succeeding writer, who has touched the excellencies of our poet in these respects with a more masterly hand, than Dryden. In the well-known preface to his Fables he has observed, that "Chaucer has taken into the compass of his Canterbury Tales, the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other, not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptiste Porta could not have described their natures better, than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humours, and callings, that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious

characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity. Their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some are virtuous; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different. The reve, the miller, and the cook, are several men, and distinguished from each other, as much as the mincing lady prioress, and the broad-speaking gap-tothed* Wife of Bath."

General remarks on the Tales.

Previous to the days of Gower, Chaucer, and Bocaccio, the only popular fictions of Europe were the metrical romances of chivalry. The ridicule conveyed in Chaucer's Rhyme of Sir Thopas, and the impatience with which he is interrupted in the progress of his story by the lively Host, show

* Mr. Tyrwhitt reads "gat-tothed;" another reading is "cat-tothed." The learned critic professes himself unable to explain the etymological meaning of either of these terms, but refers to the following passage, from which the general sense is clear:—

> But yet I had alway a coltes toth;
> Gat-tothed I was, and that became me wele:
> I had the print of Seinté Venus' sele.
>
> *Wife of Bathe's Prologue*, line 6185.

that, in the age of the poet, these compositions were already accounted wearisome*; but their subject matter, as well as the spirit in which they were written, continued long to exercise a powerful influence on the literature of Europe. The romance of the Cid, in Spain—the poetry of Luigi Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto, in Italy—and that of Spenser, in England, is grounded, in great measure, on a chivalric basis; and the numerous prose romances which amused the leisure hours of the unlettered baron, or even occasionally of the scarcely more learned clerk, gave way only to a taste for religious controversy, introduced by the Reformation, and to the powerful ridicule of Rabelais and Cervantes. Generally speaking, tales, such as we find in the "Confessio Amantis," in the "Canterbury Pilgrimage," and in the "Decameron," may be said to form an intermediate step between the romances of chivalry, and the more modern schools (various as they are) of novelists.

The origin of this class of novels is traced to such collections of tales as those found in the "Dolo-

* No more of this, for Goddes dignitie.
Cant. Tales, l. 13868.

patos *," the "Seven Wise Masters," and the "Gesta Romanorum." The latter of these collections had the most influence upon the literature of this country: and, in particular, some of the tales in Gower's great English work are directly derived from it. The tales of Chaucer turn much less than those of his contemporary, upon such subjects as most abound in the "Romaine Gestes." Both poets, however, have treated of the subject of Appius and Virginia; and as they neither of them follow Livy very closely, or very minutely resemble each other, they, in all probability, derived the circumstances of their stories from some intermediate source common to both. In the "Wife of Bathe's Tale," the subject and incidents of Gower's "Florent †," have been advantageously treated by Chaucer; but as Mr. Tyrwhitt ‡ observes, both poets very

* Eastern tales also, especially those of Bidpai, had an early influence upon European fiction. The "Arabian Nights" were not known in any European language till a comparatively late era.

"Bidpai" was translated into Greek, by desire of Alexius Comnenus, in the year 1100.—Dunlop's Hist. of Fict. vol. ii. p. 156.

† See Ellis's Specimens, vol. i., where the Florent of Gower is given at length.

‡ Introduct. Discourse, p. 93, quarto edit.

probably derived their story from an older narrative in the Gesta Romanorum, or some such collection. The tale which Chaucer seems to have most directly borrowed from his contemporary, is that of Custance, which forms the subject of the Man of Law's Tale. That this fiction was not the invention of Gower, has been remarked by Tyrwhitt: but he has failed to observe that this is one of the very numerous instances in which the Italian novelists, and the English poets, have united upon the subjects of their stories. Mr. Dunlop * has informed us that the tale in question forms a part of the "Pecorone" of Ser Giovanni: and a similar inadvertence, or rather want of knowledge, on the part of the very acute and admirable critic of the "Canterbury Tales," is noticed in the British Bibliographer; where it is shown that the Miller's Tale, supposed original by Tyrwhitt, was, since it forms the subject of one of Masuccio's novels, in all probability derived by the poet and the prose-writer from some common origin.

Many of our English poets, especially Shakspeare,

* Hist. of Fiction, vol. ii. 383.

have been much indebted to the Italian novelists for the incidents of their stories; and of this connexion between English and Italian literature, a remarkable instance exists in the similarity between the "Canterbury Pilgrimage" and the "Decameron." This similarity is not confined to the mere general plan of the two works; the tales of both authors embrace, in a great measure, the same topics, and satirise the same vices and superstitions. Many of the tales of Chaucer have a common origin* with those of Bocaccio: and the Clerk's Tale is evidently borrowed (through the medium, indeed, of the Latin translation of Petrarch) from the "Griselda" of the Italian novelist.

Comparison of Chaucer and Bocaccio as novelists.

It may be thought, perhaps, that the satire contained in Chaucer's work, upon the Catholic clergy, affords direct proof of his adherence to the reforming principles of Wickliffe; but we have already seen how the charlatanerie of reliques was ridiculed, in another age, by the pious Catholic, John Heywood. The same subject is treated with equal freedom, and with infinitely more

* The Frankelein's, with G. x. n. 5. The Reve's, with G. ix. n. 6. The Shipman's, with G. viii. n. 1.

humour, by Chaucer, in his Pardoner's character, and by Bocaccio, in that of Fra Cipolla*. In the history of Ser Ciapelletto (the opening novel of the "Decameron") the Catholic practices, of confession and of canonization, are mocked in a yet more open and audacious manner. In the second novel, a Jew is made to remark satirically, that the Christian religion must of necessity be supported by Divine aid, since the human agents appointed to watch over its interests exercise all their ingenuity and skill to destroy it: and in several † of the subsequent tales, the indolence and sensuality of friars and monks are exposed, fully as unsparingly as in the poetry of Chaucer.

In the incidents of his satirical tales Bocaccio, though he may be less offensively gross, is more dangerously licentious, than our English poet; and for this he offers us no apology: indeed he

* G. vi. n. 10.

† G. iii. n. 1, 4, and 7. G. iv. n. 4. Ser Giovanni, towards the conclusion of the 14th century, is not less severe upon the Catholic clergy.—Pecorone, G. iii. n. 1. But Dante takes the lead of all the Italians in condemning the abuses of the Papal system, in which he is followed by Petrarch, as well as by Bocaccio.

quietly informs us that he writes "per cacciar la malinconia delle femmine." In the poetical defence * which Chaucer offers for his sins on the score of decency, although he establishes no case for himself, yet he proves that there was a class of his readers, amongst whom we will hope were included the fair sex, who would be scandalised at the immoral and indecent incidents he relates; thus indirectly showing that the moral tone of society in England, whether owing to the reformers and puritans †, or to whatever other cause, was higher in his day, as it has been ever since, than that of Italy. It should be observed, however, in defence of Italy in a subsequent age, that Ariosto apprehended similar objections to his ribaldry, as will appear from the following line of

* In the General Prologue, l. 728, and in the Miller's Prologue, l. 3168, he imagines himself merely a rehearser of tales actually related by such "cherls" as the Miller, the Reve, and "many other mo." It is much to the credit of our poet, that the main incidents of the Miller's Tale can be shown to be not his own; while all the most graphic and valuable parts of the poem, the characters of the Oxford Clerk, Hendy Nicholas, and of the Parish Clerk, Absalon, are clearly original.

† It appears from the Shipman's Prologue, that forbearance from ribaldry, idle jesting, and swearing, were characteristics of the reformers, in the days of Wickliffe, as they were of the puritans in the days of the Stuarts.

Sir John Harrington's translation, which I give in preference to the original, because it approaches very nearly to the words of Chaucer *—

"Turn o'er the leaf, and let this tale alone."

With regard to the literary merits of the respective fictions of Chaucer and Bocaccio, the distinctions lie on the very surface of the subject. In the choice of the occasion; in the variety and delicate discrimination of the characters, and in the vivacity and dramatic effect with which the whole plot is conducted; in all these respects, Bocaccio, when compared with Chaucer, is but a mere shadow. As a lively and agreeable fabulist, the Italian, especially in his serious tales, has the advantage. Prolixity, a fault common to all our old poets, is one of the principal blemishes of Chaucer's serious productions. With Bocaccio, the subject of the "Knight's Tale" forms, as it should do, a separate and a considerable poem: and such, indeed, was its original destination in the hands of the English poet. As it now appears, and as one of a long series of tales, we

* Turne over the leef and chese another tale.
Miller's Prologue.

cannot help feeling, with the Knight who relates it,

I have got wot a largé felde to ere *.

The field, indeed, large as it is, has been cultivated, in parts at least, with triumphant success † by Chaucer, though, with his usual modesty, he complains, in the person of his Knight, that "weke ben the oxen in my plow;" yet we cannot help suspecting, that, when once the verdant spots have been discovered, the reader will scarcely be persuaded to revisit any others. In one respect, however, the "Knight's Tale" is admirably qualified for the situation which it occupies amongst the tales of the Pilgrims; though removed in time and scene to the heroic ages of Greece, it is throughout, in the hands of Chaucer, a feudal and chivalric story ‡. But this aptness of the tale to its relater is common to the whole series, with the

* To plough. I suppose from *aro*.

† Compare the "Teseide" with the Knight's Tale.

‡ The manners and customs of this Tale are, in accordance with the universal practice of the mediæval authors, those of the poet's own age and nation. Twice is the observance of May-day introduced, in which ceremony Emelie and Arcite severally engage. Arcite, when returned from Thebes in disguise, is appointed Squier of the Chambre to Emelie. So in the Troilus and Cresseide we find Parliaments and Burgesses.

exception of those related by the poet himself. It is, perhaps, the intention of Chaucer, by the expressions in the Miller's Prologue, already alluded to, to excuse himself from the charge of ribaldry, on the ground that the Miller's, and similar tales, are suited to the characters who relate them. This, indeed, is the ground of defence which Francis Beaumont, in his letter to Speght, endeavours to establish for the poet; and certainly the characters of the "cherls" would have been less fully illustrated, had they been exhibited as drawling out the doleful "tragedies" of the Monk, or the monastic legends of the Nonne or the Prioresse.

Some of the most pleasing instances of this attention to dramatic effect, are to be found in the tales which turn upon popular superstitions, and supernatural agency: in the fairy tale of the Wife of Bathe, with its picturesque * and ap-

* In olde dayes of King Artour,
Of which that† Bretons speken gret honour,
All was the land fulfilled of faerie:
The elf-quene, with here joly compagnie,

† "Of which that," a common expression with Chaucer for "of which."

propriate introduction; and in the tales of magic related by the Squier and the Frankelein, all of which are admirably adapted to the notions and characters of the respective narrators.

Danced ful oft, in many a grené mede:
This was the old opinion as I rede.
I speke of many hundred yeres ago;
But now can no man see non elves mo,
For now grete charitee and prayeres
* Of limitoures and other holy freres,
That serchen every land and every streme,
As thikke as motes in the sonné-beme,
Blessing halles, chambres, kichenes, and boures,
Cities and burghes, castles high and toures,
† Thropes, and bernes, shepenes and dairies,
This maketh that ther ben no fairies:
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the limitour himself,
‡ In undermeles and morweninges,
And sayth his matines and holy thinges,
As he goth in his limitation.

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* Limitour, a mendicant friar licensed to preach, or to absolve, within a certain district.

† Thorps or villages.

‡ Undermeles and morweninges—afternoons and mornings—it may perhaps signify the hours of meles (meals,) *i. e.* at breakfast and dinner-times.

CHAPTER VI.

PROSE WORKS OF CHAUCER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

Review of the history of prose compositions.

THE general use of letters, and, consequently, the earliest æra of prose composition, does not date farther back than about the middle of the sixth century before Christ. Previous to that period, letters, though not unknown, were, chiefly from the want of fit and convenient materials, not brought into general use; and compositions of every sort were, for the sake of being more easily retained in the memory, subjected to the laws of metre. The earliest prose writings of the Greeks are characterised by Strabo as narrations, differing from the previous metrical compositions, rather in the absence of verse, than in plan or in style. The authors were, for the most part, predecessors of Herodotus* in historical narrative; and the

* Pherecydes of Athens, Cadmus of Miletus, Hellanicus, &c.

work of Herodotus himself will, in a great measure, exemplify the general character of their writings. The history of Herodotus forms an intermediate step between epic poetry (the most ancient kind of history) and regular historical narrative. Both in plan and in style, this work has many of the characteristics of an epic poem. The people of Greece stand in the place of the hero of the story: the action consists in the defeat of the Persians, and their expulsion from Greece: and the story is diversified by episodes, which bear as great a proportion to the main work, and occur as frequently, as in any metrical composition of an historical nature. Besides this, the scheme and object of the narrative is as much to amuse as to instruct; and, indeed, it is owing to this its pervading quality, that it has been supposed to be included in the general censure passed by Thucydides * upon historical works of this character.

But even the work of Thucydides is not altogether in accordance with the severe and critical spirit which is required and approved of in the

* General introduction.

present day. In the orations interspersed in his work, however valuable may be the general illustrations which they contain of the political opinions and habits of the times, we possess* rather the arguments, which presented themselves to the author's mind or which he had gathered from discussion, than the actual expressions, or even sentiments, of the speakers. This dramatic form of historical composition, while it imparts to history ornaments and charms which belong more properly to poetry, diminishes from the severity of its truth, and therefore, however popular it may be in an age when the great mass of mankind is unlettered and unphilosophical, it is altogether discontinued in an age of critical inquiry. By the historians of Rome †, this dramatic form was carried to much greater extravagance than it had been by their Grecian predecessors and instructors; nor was it finally disused by the modern historians ‡ of Europe, till towards the close of the sixteenth century.

* Thucyd. 41, ch. 23.

† Sallust, Livy, Tacitus. See the speech of Galgacus in the latter author, and others equally imaginary.

‡ See Giov. Villani, Hollinshed, and our chroniclers generally.

To those who are chiefly attached to the beauties of the classic writers of antiquity, this characteristic of ancient historical composition will appear rather a proof of taste than of credulity: and, perhaps, a yet stronger evidence of the sacrifice which ancient historians made of fact to style, and of instruction to amusement, is afforded by the marvellous relation and prodigies which, with the most popular amongst their works, are (as the reader may please to determine) either adorned or disfigured. The tales of Herodotus, and the portentous prodigies of Livy, are scarcely exceeded in extravagance by those of Villani, or even of Geoffroy of Monmouth. The Greek and the Roman authors either received, as did our countryman, Mandeville, the relations of others with implicit faith, or introduced them into their compositions, as subjects of popular credence; from which to dissent would have been at least unpleasing to their readers, if not hazardous to themselves.

Books of travels previous to Mandeville.

Voyages and travels may be found interspersed in various ancient poetical, historical, and geographical works; and Purchas, in his collec-

tion of Pilgrimages, includes instances from the Old Testament. But, in the ancient world, books of travels did not form a distinct branch of literature. The narration in the "Odyssey," perhaps, in one point of view may, for a moment*, be regarded as a collection of travellers' tales. That part of the work of Herodotus which describes the manners of the Scythians, and other northern nations is, in effect, a book of travels; and much of the writings of Strabo, and other old geographers, falls under the same class; but with the ancients, and with our mediæval ancestors, foreign expeditions were attended with great personal risk and inconvenience; and consequently, works of travels, which have ever increased in proportion to the increased facility of locomotion, were long unknown as a distinct class of books.

The earliest extant works, professing to give an account of travels, are the compositions of Arabians. Wahab visited India, China, and other parts of the world, in the year 851.

* This view of the marvellous fictions of the Odyssey will probably shock those who are accustomed to regard them in an allegorical point of view.

Ebn Haubal, whose work has been rendered into English by Sir W. Ouseley, travelled in the tenth century. Scherifal Edrisi is the most celebrated descriptive geographer of the twelfth century.

In the thirteenth century, the monks of western Europe take the lead in foreign adventure. In 1222, Bonaventura Broccardus, a Westphalian monk, travelled to Palestine. In 1254 Ascelin, a Dominican friar, went to the Chan of Tartary, on a mission from Pope Innocent the Fourth. Carpini, an Italian, and Rubruquis, (Ruisbrook,) a Brabanter, undertook similar expeditions in the same century. But the most celebrated book of travels previous to that of our countryman, Mandeville, is the account of Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant.

Most of these primitive relations of travels (but especially, perhaps, the work of Mandeville) abound in the marvellous. Rubruquis describes savages two feet high, and covered with hair *. Marco Polo speaks of a bird called Ruch, (the Roc of Sindbad's Voyages,) which was powerful enough to lift an elephant, or a rhino-

Sir John Mandeville.

* Supposed to be apes.

ceros. Mandeville, in his accounts of monsters, whether of the human race or of animals, draws upon the same sources from which his predecessors had been supplied *; and to these prodigies he adds, miracles from Legends, and marvellous tales from romantic fictions. On one occasion we find the metamorphosis of a virgin into a rose-tree, gravely stated as the origin of that plant, and of its flower. On another, we have the transformation of a woman into a dragon. The power of speech Mandeville does not hesitate to attribute, as in the allegorical fable of Jotham †, to trees. The trees of the "Sonne and Moune" are said to have warned King Alisandre (Alexander the Great) of his "deth."

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine which amongst romantic and marvellous fictions are to be assigned to an Eastern origin; which to Grecian or classic invention, and which belong more strictly to northern mythology. Generally speaking, however, the East has in all ages been the chief, as well as the primitive, source of

* Ptolemy, Diodorus, or Pliny.

† Book of Judges.

the mysterious and supernatural; while the Greek mind has rather delighted in the observance and study of nature, whether physical or moral, and has attached itself, whether in art or poetry, to what a late distinguished French authoress * has styled "l'imitation du vrai."

There are, however, a few amongst the extravagant relations of Mandeville which seem clearly to belong to the Oriental class. Such is the supernatural power which he attributes to *diamonds* †, which he describes as able to destroy the power of evil spirits, to heal the lunatic, and to discover the presence of venom or poison. Such also is the miraculously-gifted Sparhauk, guarded by a "fayre lady of Faerie ‡."

Between the fictions of the Odyssey, those of the voyages of Sindbad, and those of Mandeville, there is a frequent and very remarkable similarity: and it would seem that the character of "the English Ulysses," gravely attributed to Mandeville, by

* Madame de Staël.

† Compare the virtue attributed to diamonds in the "Romaunt of the Rose;" dress of Richesse.

‡ P. 176, edit. 1725.

Bale and by Coryate *, on the score of the extent of his travels, is also fairly due to him as an imitator of the entertaining guest at the court of Alcinous. A plant, possessing the virtues of the lotus, is spoken of in the voyages of Sindbad; and Polyphemes are common to the tales of the "Arabian Nights," to the "Odyssey," and to Mandeville.

The Natural History of Pliny, from which Mandeville chiefly drew the accounts of his monstrous beings, seems also to have supplied the voyages of Sindbad with similar materials. The Cyclops of the "Arabian Nights" is represented with long ears covering his shoulders, after the fashion of a race of creatures described by the Roman naturalist. The combat, also, between the eagles and the elephants, related in the travels of Sindbad, is derived from a story in Pliny.

The work of Mandeville, popular and generally diffused † as it was, may be considered to have supplied, or to have suggested, many of the mar-

* See Hackluyt's translation of Bale's Life of Mandeville, vol. ii. 76, and Coryate's "Crudities" (preface).

† It was written, as is known to every one, in French and in Latin, as well as in English.

vellous relations, so common with the mediæval poets of Europe: the Chronicle of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the Fabulous Life of Charlemagne, attributed to an imaginary author *, are usually regarded as the chief sources of poetic romance: but there can be no doubt that the Travels of Mandeville had considerable influence in encouraging a taste for marvellous tales, and more especially for fictions of an Oriental cast. In the age of our traveller, the "Arabian Nights," if indeed the work existed at all in any thing like the present form †, was at least a sealed book to European scholars.

With Chaucer, in particular, the work of his contemporary was evidently a favourite; and of this a distinct proof is afforded in the magical exhibition described in the Frankelein's Tale ‡, which very closely resembles a similar exhibition related by Mandeville to have taken place before the Khan of Tartary §.

Were we to confine our attention to the marvel-

* Archbishop Turpin.

† This expression is hardly, perhaps, allowable; since the manuscripts of the original work vary considerably in different countries.

‡ Cant. Tales, v. 11495. § Chap. xxii. edit. 1725.

lous and incredible portions of Mandeville's work, we should entertain a partial and unjust view of his character. Considered merely as an agreeable fabulist, and as mainly influencing the poetic fictions of his age, he is an author not altogether devoid of interest; it may be said of him that his

> Storyes to rede ar delectabill,
> Suppose that thai be nocht bot fabill.

But besides that he is our earliest prose author * of any consideration, and our very first narrator of travels, the credible facts related in his work are alone sufficient to render it worthy of attention.

The journey from Constantinople to Jerusalem, the locality of the holy city itself, and the proceedings of the pilgrims, when arrived at their destination, are all minutely related by the traveller. To give instruction to pilgrims was, indeed, as he explains at length in his prologue, the principal and immediate object of his work, which was written "spe-

* English prose, previous to Mandeville, is confined to paraphrases, or translations of some of the Psalms, or other small portions of the Scriptures.

cyally for hem, that wylle and are in purpos for to visite the Holy Citee of Jerusalem, and the holy places that are thereaboute." The account also which Mandeville has given us of the court of the Great Khan, in whose armies he and his fellow-travellers served fifteen months, may be regarded as one of those portions of his work which are divested of the marvellous and incredible *. In short, there does not appear in the author any deliberate intention to deceive; the extravagant marvels which he relates, on the authority of others, he either implicitly believes, or qualifies his assertions with the ὡς λέγουσι of Herodotus, "men seyn:" what he relates on his own authority, and as an eye-witness, may generally be received as credible.

John de Trevisa, a Cornishman by birth, but vicar of Berkeley, in Gloucestershire, and chaplain to Thomas Lord Berkeley, is chiefly known to us as the translator of the "Polycronicon" of Ranulph Higden, a Latin work very nearly contempo- Trevisa.

* The magical exhibition before the Khan appears to have been a display of jugglers or conjurors; the frequency of which, as amusements of the great, may have given rise to much of this nature which we read of in the mediæval poets.

rary with the translation. If we remember that this composition professed to give us a history of the world from the creation to the year 1357, the title of "Polychronicon" will not seem much misapplied.

The work of Trevisa was continued, as well as printed, by Caxton, from whose expressions it seems that we should not be altogether justified, in receiving it as a specimen of the language of Trevisa's age. "I, William Caxton, a symple persone, have endevoyred to wryte first over all the sayd book of Polycronycon, and some what have chaunged the rude and old English, that is to wete certain wordes, which in these dayes be neither usyd ne understanden." Caxton's continuation closes with "the yere of our Lord 1460, and the fyrst yere of Kyng Edward the Fourth." He regrets, with his usual modesty and simplicity, the imperfection of his work, and dares not to unite it in the same volume with that of Higden; amongst other reasons, because he can find no "book of auctoryteé" treating of the time intervening between his own age, and that of Trevisa, except a "lytell book called 'Fasciculus

Temporum,' and another called Aureus 'de Universo.'"

As several hundred lines in metre occur in the course of Trevisa's translation, he might, perhaps, claim a place amongst our early versifiers: but the truth is that his value as an author, whether prose or poetical, is but trifling. Whether he translated the entire Bible, has been a controverted question *; but it does not appear that there exists any substantial proof of the affirmative. The honour, therefore, of having first given to England a complete translation of the Scriptures, belongs to Wickliffe.

In a review of English prose works contemporary with Chaucer, it is impossible to omit altogether some slight notice of those of our great reformer: yet, to do more than to refer the reader to the principal authorities on this subject, would exceed the limits of this work. The primary authority for our knowledge of the writings of Wickliffe, whether Latin or English, is afforded by the Scriptores Britannici of Bale. Wickliffe.

* Le Bas's "Life of Wickliffe," p. 219. British Bibliographer, vol. iv. 353.

Upon the account given us by Bale, the ninth chapter of Lewis's Life of Wickliffe is grounded; but the most complete, or at least the most clearly digested catalogue, of these writings, will be found in the twelfth chapter of the late valuable work by Mr. Le Bas. In his Life of Wickliffe, Mr. Le Bas has distributed the works into five sections:— 1. His printed works; 2. Manuscripts extant in England and Ireland: 3. Manuscripts at Vienna, of which there is a catalogue in the British Museum; 4. Those pieces of which the titles only are known; 5. Works improperly attributed to Wickliffe. Specimens of the English style of Wickliffe may be found in almost every chapter of his Life by Lewis; but more particularly in the eighth chapter, which contains collections illustrative of the doctrines and religious opinions of the reformer.

It has been calculated that, notwithstanding the diligence used in suppressing and destroying the works of Wickliffe, full three-fourths of them survive at the present day. Of these, by far the greater number are manuscripts in this country; and many of them are in our own tongue. In Eng-

land, his writings, more particularly his English compositions, were very diligently suppressed and prohibited; but it appears that their actual destruction and conflagration took place more frequently on the Continent. Lewis informs us, that Subinco Lepus, Bishop of Prague, burnt two hundred volumes (*i. e.* tracts, or treatises), very finely written, and ornamented with costly covers * and gold bosses: he also gives us a catalogue of sixteen different works, which were carried into Bohemia, and there burnt.

The satirical passages of Chaucer's poetry afford us an entertaining commentary upon the strictures of the reformer on the mendicant friars. The main attack, as well with Wickliffe as with all our early satirical poets, is directed against the mendicant orders, who, more than any other class of men, may be regarded as the ultimate cause of reformation in religion. Wickliffe was first roused to the warfare which he afterwards carried on against the papal hierarchy, by the opposition and annoyance

* Compare the account which Froissart has given us of the volume which he presented to Richard the Second.—Johnes's Froissart, vol. xi. p. 153, 8vo.

which, when professor of divinity at Oxford, he experienced from these vagrant orders, with whom all the universities of Christendom then swarmed; while the impositions and frauds which the ploughmen and middle classes of country neighbourhoods were constantly enduring from the same impostors, gave occasion to the attacks directed against them by the popular poets of this and the succeeding age.

Prose works of Chaucer.

The interest to be derived from the prose works of Chaucer is twofold: first, as they illustrate his own life, or afford a comment on his poetry; secondly, as they throw a light upon the spirit and taste of the age. Compared with his poetical works, their intrinsic value is, on the whole, but trifling. In one of these works we have a treatise on an astronomical instrument; in a second, a mere translation from Boethius; in a third, an imitation (not, perhaps, an improvement) of the Latin author. Enumerated according to their probable chronological order, they would stand thus: the translation of Boethius, the Astrolabe, the Testament of Love, and the two prose tales which occur in the course of the Canterbury

Pilgrimage, namely the poet's own tale of Melibœus, and that of the Parson. But the Astrolabe, which contains the date of an observation made in 1391, is the only one of these compositions which can be assigned to a fixed and exact date.

The consideration of a treatise on an astronomical instrument belongs rather to the history of science than to that of literature; and under that head, according to Speght's edition of 1602, it should occupy a distinguished place, since (as is therein affirmed) "it standeth so good at this day, especially for the horizon of Oxford, as, in the opinion of the learned, it cannot be amended."

In this treatise the subjects of astronomy and astrology are, according to the common practice of the age, united, or rather considered as one and the same; and the chief interest now to be derived from the Astrolabe arises from the illustration which it affords us of the serious views of the author upon the latter subject. Allusions to astrology, in the poetical works of Chaucer, are very frequent. The Wife of Bathe, in her celebrated prologue*,

* Cant. Tales, l. 6191.

humorously alludes to the stars, as influencing her character. In the description of the "Doctour," and in the third book * of the "House of Fame," astrology is connected, according to the usual opinions and practice of the age, with the science of medicine. The "Doctour of Physicke"

> Was well grounded in astronomie;
> He kept his patient a ful gret del
> In hourés by his magike naturell.
> Wel coude he fortunen the ascendent
> Of his images for his patient.

From the "Astrolabe" we learn, that "a fortunate ascendante clepen thei, when no wicked planette of Saturne or Mars, or els the taile of the Dragon is in the hous of the ascendente, ne that no wicked planette have no aspect of enemitie upon the ascendente;" and shortly after follows a chapter upon "the special declaration of *the houres* of the planettes."

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* Line 175:—

> And clerkes eke, which conné well
> All this magicke naturell,
> That craftely do her intentés
> To maken, in *certayne ascendentes*,
> *Ymages*, lo! through whilk magyke
> To maken a man ben hole or seke.

The work is addressed by the author to his "litell son Louis," a child of ten years old; and if really intended for his use, it may be regarded as a proof of parental affection. But it would rather seem that, in this respect, Chaucer adopted the practice, not unusual in a later age, of nominally addressing to a son what was really meant for the world at large; at least whether "litell Louis" was intended for a shipman or a "doctour of physick," it must be confessed that he was introduced to the more abstruse departments of his studies at a sufficiently early age; especially when we take into the account that our printed copies of this treatise do not contain more than two * of the five parts which it originally comprehended, or was intended to comprise.

Chaucer's translation of Boethius "de Consolatione Philosophiæ," is the oldest English translation of the Latin work: but it had previously been rendered into Saxon by King Alfred, and into French by Jean de Meun †, the continuator of

* See the introductory expressions, beginning, "this treatise, devided in five parts," &c.

† Biogr. Univers. vol. iv. p. 646. This translation, which is dedi-

William of Lorris's "Roman de la Rose." The popularity of the original work is attested, by the numerous translations made of it* in different ages, and into various modern languages. In England, the example of Chaucer was followed by John the Chaplain, Lydgate, Colville and Lord Preston. The performance of our poet, which was in all probability a juvenile essay, is by no means superior to those of a later date: and yet the estimation in which it was held as late as the age of Caxton, is shown by the preference which the printer gave to it over the works of John Walton, or of Lydgate; the latter of whom, at least, enjoyed a considerable reputation, as an author and a poet, in the days of the father of the English press. The following expressions in Caxton's epilogue prove, rather in an entertaining manner, the value which he himself set upon the work.

"And furthermore I desire and require you that of your charity ye would pray for the soul of the said worshipful man, Geoffray Chaucer, first trans-

cated to Philippe le Bel, is accounted the earliest French translation of Boethius.

* In the Bibliotheca Britannica are enumerated fifty-seven different editions and translations of this work, in ancient and modern languages.

lator of the said book into English, and embellisher, in making the said language ornate and fair, which shall endure perpetually."

The work of Boethius was written, as were a great variety of yet more celebrated efforts of genius, under a state of persecution. The "last of the Romans," as he has sometimes been styled, was imprisoned by Theodoric, who had lately invaded Italy, and had overthrown the kingdom of Odoacer. In prison, friendless, and without the prospect of worldly prosperity, Boethius had recourse to such consolation, as a richly stored mind can derive, on such occasions, only from itself. He had translated the entire works of Plato, and had written comments on the Neoplatonic Porphyry. He had also, as is sufficiently proved by his work, given a close attention to the doctrines of Aristotle, Zeno, and the most celebrated of the ancient masters in moral philosophy: but on Plato, as it should seem, his tenets were chiefly based; and his *summum bonum* is made to consist in a contemplation of the divine nature. In solitude, as regarded the living, the companionship of the dead, who, even in more prosperous times had probably

been amongst his choicest society, was all that was left to him. The themes of his former studies crowded upon his mind, and the result has been a work in which he has united the reasoning of the philosopher with the imagination of the poet. The Lady of Philosophy (the prototype of Chaucer's Lady of Love) sometimes chaunts forth her consolations in heavenly strains *; sometimes condescends to expound her doctrines to the ravished listener in prose more adapted to mortal comprehension. The whole presents to the modern reader a curious and interesting picture of the philosophic and literary mind of a remote age.

It may well be doubted whether Boethius was a Christian. If a Christian at all, he was one of that philosophizing class, who, in the days of Origen and Clement of Alexandria, rose from the Neoplatonic school. The general tone, indeed, of his work, is such as might well suit a Christian mind; yet there is no direct allusion to the leading doctrines of our religion; nor is the consolation or happiness which the author seeks, and of which he treats, in any degree based upon Christian views.

* Chaucer's translation is entirely in prose.

As regards Chaucer's translation of this work, the chief interest to be derived from it, consists in the proof which it affords us of the taste of the poet for philosophical studies, and in the direction which it seems to have given to his mind, towards the consideration of some abstruse subjects of which mention is occasionally made in his poems. It will be recollected, that, in the Nonne's Priest's Tale, Chaucer alludes, modestly, or perhaps rather satirically, to the dark question of predestination:

> But I ne cannot boult it to the bren,
> As can the holy doctour Augustin,
> Or Bœcé, or the bishop Bradwardin.

The attention of the poet was, in all probability, directed in early life to this subject, by his translation of Boethius—a work which, in the department of philosophy, was equal in popularity and influence to that of the Roman de la Rose, in poetry. The degree in which the mind of Chaucer appears to have been influenced by the translations and studies of his youth, is not the least remarkable circumstance of his life and literary character.

The "Testament of Love" is a close imitation of the work of Boethius. Love, who, according to the chivalric notions of the age, was a divinity of the highest class, is, in this composition (as Philosophy is in that of Boethius), personified under the form of a beautiful woman. With her the author holds a dialogue, similar in spirit and in substance to that of the Latin work; and so closely is the plan of Boethius adopted, that the Lady of Love is supposed to chaunt in Latin, while the entranced auditor humbly translates her admonitions into English. She promises (in the form of a bequest or testament) consolation to the sufferer, not from the contemplation of the Divine perfection, but from the possession of that precious jewel, the margerite *, or pearl. The following passage, addressed by the lady to her disciple, will, perhaps more than any other, illustrate the general scope and nature of the work.

"Trulie, mine own disciple †, because I have the

* The expression "Margarye Perlis" occurs in the Vision of William. Extracts apud Warton, vol. ii. p. 109.

† "My *disciple* and my poete" are the expressions applied to Chaucer by Venus, in the "Confessio Amantis" of Gower.

founde at al assais in thy wil to be redie mine hestes to have followed, and haste been true to that margerite perle, that ones I the shewed; and she agenward hath made but dangerous chere. I am come in proper persone, to put the out of errours, and make the glad by waies of reson, so that sorrow ne disese shall no more hereafter the amaistrie. Wherthrow I hope thou shalt lightly come to thy grace, that thou haste desired, of thilke jewel. Haste thou not herd many ensamples, how I have comforted and relieved the scholers of my love? who hath worthied kinges in the felde? who hath honoured ladies in boure, by a perpetual mirror of their truth in my service? who hath caused worthie folke to voide vice and shame? who hath holde cities and relmes in prosperitie? If the list clepe agen thyne olde remembraunce, thou couldest every poincte of this declare in especiell, and saie that I, thy maistres, have be cause, causying these thynges, and many mo other *."

In this passage are displayed the romantic no-

* How far more poetical is the style of this prose than the verse of the Romaunt of the Rose, or of the Dreme, cannot fail to strike every reader.

tions of love entertained by the poets of the age. The true lover, as in the "Confessio Amantis" of Gower, is supposed to possess every virtue, and to be worthy of the highest reward, *i. e.* the marguerite. The marguerite, which, in the French language, signifies a daisy as well as a pearl, is a constant theme of praise with Froissart, and Chaucer; and in the "Floure and the Leafe" a song is introduced, under the title of "Si douce est la marguerite," which is, in fact, the title of one of Froissart's poems. But the explanation of the mythology (if it may so be called) of the marguerite, or daisy, must be sought for in the prologue to the Legende, where we are told that it is emblematic of the "trouth of womanhood!" The jewell, therefore, or pearl, to the grace of which the author of the "Testament of Love" is bid to aspire, through the assistance of his instructress and consoler, is the fidelity of his mistress. Speght* has supposed, but without the slightest foundation, that Margaret Countess of Pembroke is typified under the marguerite. The truth is, that the whole subject is no more than one of the fantastic and extravagant

* See Warton's Engl. Poetry, vol. ii. 302. 8vo.

fancies of the age, the idea of which was borrowed from the ceremonies of the May Games *. In no work of this period are the romantic notions with regard to devotion to the sex so strongly exemplified as in the Testament, wherein Virtue and Philosophy are typified under the character of the Lady of Love, and the virtuous man is identified with the constant lover. Perhaps the "Confessio Amantis" of Gower approaches the nearest to the prose work of Chaucer in this respect; and that a correspondence existed between the two friends and contemporaries, on the subject of their respective works, is evident from the well-known lines of Gower, in which he supposes himself commissioned by Venus to urge "her disciple and poete" to the completion of his "Testament of Love."

The "Testament of Love," like its prototype, was written in prison. Were we to abstract from literature all that we owe to the calamities of

* Emelie, in the Knight's Tale, when engaged in the observance of May-day, is described as gathering

"Floures, partie white and red,
To make a sotel gerlond for hire hed."

authors, the remainder would prove comparatively light in the balance. The blindness of the ancient bards of Greece is matter rather for poetry than for literary history: but, to say nothing of "blind Mæonides," is it not reasonable to think that "celestial light" shone inward with our great epic poet the more vividly, because "wisdom at one entrance" was shut out? Is it not in accordance with our ideas of the benevolent spirit of a Providence, through which good is continually produced from evil, to suppose that the powers and energies of some of the most vigorous and active minds, of various ages and countries, have been diverted, by misfortune, from the restless scenes of ambition, into the tranquil paths of literary pursuits? Would Thucydides or Clarendon have been numbered amongst the most valued of historians, or Dante amongst the noblest of poets, had they not been driven by exile from the field of political intrigue or exertion? The very walls of a prison have not unfrequently been the only witnesses to the production of some of the most touching and pathetic, if not the noblest, efforts of genius. I know not precisely what may be thought of the genuineness of those

lines which we now receive as composed by the lion-hearted Richard, when he had been detained two tedious winters (dos hyvers) in the Austrian fortress, and in which he appeals for ransom to the generosity of his barons. But we are at least indebted to the misfortunes of one royal poet for one of the most attractive productions of his age. It was within the walls of Windsor Castle, and when the prisoner of our Henry the Fifth, that James the First of Scotland composed his "King's Quair;" a poem which, for the simplicity and beauty of its rural imagery, may rank with the "Floure and the Leafe" of Chaucer. To pass over the misfortunes of Tasso, and to advert to a third instance drawn from the history of this island, let us turn to the hard fate of Raleigh. Raleigh, like Richard of England and James of Scotland, had been the hero of many battles; his life had been divided between intrigue and adventure. By an unjust sentence, he was imprisoned in that Tower which justly has been called the "lasting shame" of London, and driven for consolation, like Boethius and Chaucer, upon the resources of his own rich mind. The work which he

has left us, imperfect and unfinished as it is, is yet amongst the most admired monuments of our literature: but what adequately can be said, either of the versatility, or of the undaunted spirit of that genius, which, in solitude and adversity, could apply eloquence, long-known at the council-table, and love of enterprise long tried in foreign discovery, to a "History of the World."

Over the whole circumstance and history of Chaucer's imprisonment, an impenetrable mystery is cast; and all that we can infer from his own expressions amounts to a proof that his intentions were just and honourable, while his actions were, in some measure, under the controul of others.

CHAPTER VII.

ENGLISH LITERATURE FROM CHAUCER TO SPENSER.

The historian of English poetry, in one of those elegant passages with which the curious detail of his work is at once varied and embellished, has compared Chaucer to the appearance of a genial day in spring, preceded and followed by dark clouds and wintry blasts; and Denham, in his well-known and often-quoted lines, has presented to us nearly the same image. The works of John the Chaplain, Occleve, and Lydgate* (such at least of them as have appeared in print), will justify the gloomy character given by Warton, and by Denham, of the immediate succes-

* For specimens of these poets, see Turner's History of England, pt. iv. ch. v.

sors of Chaucer. Lydgate, indeed, possesses one distinguished advocate *, in our celebrated lyric poet, Gray, who proceeded so far towards an intended history of English poetry, as to construct a general scheme, and to write some remarks upon Lydgate. In giving the character of Lydgate he says—"I do not pretend to set him on a level with Chaucer, but he certainly comes nearest to him of any *contemporary writer* that I am acquainted with. His choice of expression, and the smoothness of his verse, far surpass both Gower and Occleve. He wanted no art in raising the more tender emotions of the mind, of which I might give several examples †." Whatever may be said of the critical or historical qualities of Warton's great work, if the preceding passage is to be taken as a specimen of the discriminating powers of Gray, it is not to be expected that, in one department at least of the undertaking, the history of English poetry would

* By Mr. Campbell (Essay prefixed to Specimens), he is called the most respectable versifier of his age.

† For these examples, see Matthias's Gray, vol. ii. p. 64.

have experienced, under his auspices, a better fate. The scheme which Gray had drawn out, as well as that of Pope, was communicated to Warton, but they were rejected by him as impracticable; and Warton's almost only guides into a region of literature hitherto unexplored, were the Treatises of Webbe, Sidney, or Puttenham. With such difficulties in his path, some few failings in the execution of his design are rather to be excused than censured; the work was one which, merely to have planned and undertaken, required talent, as well as courage; with all his inaccuracies, no single writer has advanced half so much that is true on the subject of his inquiries as himself; and to this sterling excellence he has added graces and ornaments, which only a rich and classic mind can impart to the driest details. While, therefore, we may in part condemn the work, we shall at least admire the author.

Between the age of Chaucer and that of Spenser, the history of English poetry, properly so called, is but a barren theme; but, in Scotland, poetry was continued during this period,

not without success, and in a language as similar to the southern dialect as it has been in almost any succeeding age. To Barbour, the contemporary of Gower and Chaucer, succeed Harry the Minstrel, James the First, Dunbar, Henryson, Bishop Douglas, Sir David Lyndesay, and the royal pupil of the "Lion King at Arms," James the Fifth. In England, during the age succeeding that of Lydgate, amidst numerous obscure versifiers, Hawes, Skelton the Laureate, and his rival Barclay, elevate themselves somewhat above the general throng. To these may be added a didactic versifier, rather worthy of notice from the popularity of her theme, than from the taste with which this theme is treated. Juliana Berners, or Barnes, prioress of Sopewell, wrote a book * on the chase, partly in prose, partly metrical, and generally assigned to the reign of Henry the Sixth.

The principal work of Stephen Hawes, who be-

* Sometimes called the Book of St. Albans, from having been printed at St. Alban's Abbey. The verse portions are alliterative, though also in rhyme.

longs to the reign of Henry the Seventh, is entitled "The Pastime of Pleasure, or the History of Grande Amour and la Belle Pucelle." Grande Amour, in obtaining La Belle Pucelle, meets with allegorical personages, and encounters difficulties and dangers, very similarly to the lover in the "Romaunt of the Rose," only that the allegorical images and characters are (in accordance with the spirit of the age) of a more pedantic and learned class than those of the Romaunt. For the Tower of Jealousy, we have the Tower of Doctrine; and instead of Bialcoil (Bel Accueil), or the God of Love, the lover is conducted to Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric (in short to a kind of allegorical *trivium*), all of whom enforce their instructions in learned harangues and grave dissertations.

Skelton, a contemporary with Hawes, falls below him, as well in style and diction, as in taste and invention. In his chief work, "The Crowne of Laurell," he imagines the most celebrated authors of all ages (whom he indiscriminately terms, after his own title, poets laureate) to be assembled before Pallas. The greater part of these are Latin writers, and include not only poets, but Quintillian, Sallust,

Boethius, Macrobius, and Valerius Maximus. Three English poets only, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, are included in the catalogue. In this poem, as in the "Pastime of Pleasure" by Hawes, the old stanza of seven lines is adopted. In every respect, indeed, whether as regards the choice of subject, the style, or the metre, these two poets are merely imitators, and form no era in the history of our literature. Hawes, in his principal work, dwells on the extravagant and romantic notions of Love, which belong rather to a previous age; and Skelton's "Crowne of Laurell" is a close imitation of Chaucer's "House of Fame." His poem, called the "Bouge of Court *," consists merely of seven allegorical personifications; such as "Ryott, Dissimulation, Mischeve," &c; and to these defects, Skelton occasionally adds the yet grosser sin of indecency.

Barclay, the third character in this triumvirate of contemporary poets, may perhaps, in some degree, be accounted distinguished, as the author of the earliest eclogues in the English language; but

* The rewards of Court.

he is chiefly known to us as the translator of the "Navis Stultifera;" a work originally written in German, by Sebastian Brandt, a civilian of Basle. Alexander Barclay, after having been educated at Oriel College, was appointed one of the priests of the College of Saint Mary Ottery, in Devonshire, where, as appears from his own words, "he translated the Shyp of Folys out of Laten, French, and Doch, into Englishe tonge." The work of Barclay is, however, by no means a bare translation, since he finds a berth in his imaginary vessel for many of the low and ridiculous characters of his own country. In this respect, the "Shippe of Folis" may be regarded as a parallel to the prologue of the "Canterbury Tales," although the portraits are infinitely less graphic and humorous. The ignorance and indolence of the clergy are, as with Chaucer, the principal subjects of ridicule.

The character which he gives us of a bookworm has been often quoted, and is well known to the lovers of old English literature; but perhaps, as a specimen of the style and manner of Barclay, it may be acceptable to the general reader. The

bookworm, (the original of which portrait might perhaps have been found amongst his "eight neighbours * that first shall have a place within this my shyp,") is made the first or chief fool in the vessel:—

That in this ship the chiefe place I governe,
By this wide sea with foolis wandering,
The cause is plaine, and easy to discerne;
Still am I busy bookes assembling;
For to have plentie it is a pleasaunt thing,
In my conceyt, to have them ay at hand;
But what they meane I do not understande.

But yet I have them in great reverence,
And honour, saving them from filth and ordure,
By often brushing and much diligence;
Full goodly bounde in pleasaunt coverture
Of damas, sattin, or els of velvet pure;
I keepe them sure, fearing least they should be lost,
For in them is the cunning that I me boast.

But if it fortune that any learned man
Within my house fall to disputation,
I drawe the curtaynes to shewe my bokes then,
That they of my cunning should make probation:
I love not to fall in altercation:
And while they commen, my bookes I turne and winde,
For all is in them, and nothing in my minde.

* The eight minor canons of St. Mary Ottery.

This, as well as some few other passages of Barclay, are by no means destitute of humour. Some amongst the numerous allegorical descriptions of Hawes and Skelton might be selected, as showing descriptive powers; but, on a general survey of the comparatively feeble successors and imitators of Chaucer, it is difficult to conceive on what principle their productions maintained an equal popularity with those of that great poet. The general esteem in which the works of Lydgate* were held, may perhaps be accounted for from the nature of the subjects of which his two principal poems treat; one being a translation of the history of Troy, by Guido de Columpna, entitled, "The Troy-Book;" and the other a translation of Boccaccio's Latin work, "De Casibus Principum." To the former Shakspeare was indebted for many of the incidents of his "Troilus and Cressida," and the latter formed the model of a work, of which I shall presently endeavour to give some account, well known by the title of the "Mirrour

* Lydgate, a monk of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury, in Suffolk. The exact dates of his birth and death are uncertain; but he lived between the middle of the fourteenth and the middle of the fifteenth century.

for Magistrates." In the mean time, I proceed to a review of that department of English literary history, which, in the age immediately succeeding that of Chaucer, is chiefly interesting, namely, the prose works.

Prose writers. Bishop Pecock.

The first writer who presents himself to our consideration is Reynold Pecock, successively Bishop of St. Asaph and Chichester. Pecock, in the moderate views which he entertained of the papal power, resembles Bishop Grosthed; but Grosthed lived in an age, when the Scriptures were but very partially translated, and when the reformers were as yet unknown as a party in the state. The moderation, therefore, of the Bishop of Lincoln is more remarkable, and more distinguishes him from the Catholic clergy of his day, than does that of the author now under review. The great object of Pecock, who was a zealous Catholic, seems to have been to bring the Lollards, by reason, rather than by force, within the pale of the church. The followers of Wickliffe had, in his time, become so numerous *, that

* De Event. Anglise Coll. 2666.

Knyghton assures us, that if two persons were met travelling on the road, one of them was probably a Lollard. On many points of doctrine, as well as of discipline, the Lollards now carried on an open warfare with the Papists, and Pecock, who, in the year 1431, had been made Master of the College of St. Spirit and St. Mary, in London, founded by Sir Richard Whittington, had in the metropolis an opportunity of observing the heat of the controversy. He directed his attention to it with patience and investigation, and in 1449 published a book entitled "The Repressour," or "The Repressing of over-muche Witing (blaming) the Clergie;" in which he defends, against the Lollards, the practice of pilgrimages, the use of images in churches, and even the mendicant orders. To the Lollards, or Bible-men, as they were called, were opposed the schoolmen of the church of Rome, who upheld the authority of the church as equal with that of Scripture itself; while the Bible-men professed to regard the sacred volume as the sole guide in all matters of religion, whether of doctrine or of practice. Pecock contends that the authority of the church, in matters of doctrine,

must be grounded on Scripture, but would reserve to churchmen, and to those who "can of moral philosophie," the right of interpreting Scripture. In matters of discipline, he shows that the Scripture gives no rule: "It longith not to holi Scripture; neither it is his office, into which God him ordeyned; neither it is his part for to grounde any governaunce, or dede, or service of God, or eny trouthe, which mannis resoun bi nature may fynde, leerne, and knowe." It is plain, from his "Treatise of Faith," in what hands he believed this power to rest. "The Pope is of lyk auctorite and jurisdiction, with ech or with the gretist of the Apostles, for to make positive ordinauncis, lyk as holi Scripture, bi power of the Apostle*, maad, and for to revoke thilk positive ordinaunce of holi Scripture, maad bi the Apostle."

Pecock, as a champion of the established church of his day, bears rather a close similarity to Hooker, the author of the "Ecclesiastical Polity," particularly as regards the object which he had at heart, namely to induce the Puritans or Bible-men

* St. Peter.

to conform, conscientiously, and from the conviction of their reason, to the doctrines and discipline of the church. Hooker, in his preface, thus addresses the Puritans of his own time :—

"Mine intent, in these several books of discourse, is to make it appear to you, that, for the ecclesiastical laws of this land, we are led by great reason to observe them, and ye by no necessity bound to impugn them. It is no part of my secret meaning to draw you hereby into hatred, or to set upon the face of this cause any fairer gloss than the naked truth doth afford; but my whole endeavour is to resolve the conscience, and to shew, as near as I can, what in this controversy the heart is to think, if it will follow the light of sound and sincere judgement, without either cloud of prejudice, or mist of passionate affection."

Whatever may be the religious creed of the reader, he will at least admire the sincerity of purpose, as well as the tempered zeal, which distinguished the two ecclesiastical controversialists. Other points of similarity between them might be pointed out; particularly with regard to the view which they severally take of the legitimate pro-

vince of natural reason, either in interpreting Scripture, or in establishing religious practice and discipline; but to enter, even in the most cursory manner, upon these subjects would be foreign to the object of this volume.

Tiptoft, Rivers, and Fortescue.

If the English prose literature of the fifteenth century is interesting, on the one hand, as connected with religion, on the other it will call up before us in review some of the most prominent political characters of this troubled period of our annals. It is a little doubtful whether Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, was a patron and friend of Bishop Pecock; but he is, at all events, to be regarded as a distinguished patron of letters, and in particular, as the founder of an academical library at Oxford*.

Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, and Earl Rivers, the unfortunate partisans of Edward the Fourth, and the patrons of Caxton, were not merely the protectors of learning†, but were themselves authors. Both these noblemen wrote several

* Wood's Hist. of Oxford, vol. ii. part. ii. 914, Gutch's edit.

† Tiptoft followed the generous example of Duke Humphrey, in presenting to Oxford manuscripts to the value of 500 marks.

works (inconsiderable as they are, at least in point of bulk) in our own tongue; but Tiptoft is most known to us as the translator of Cicero "de Amicitiâ," as Rivers is by his "Dictes of the Philosophers." Both these books were printed by Caxton.

The fate of Tiptoft is well known. When constable of the Tower, he had, as is alleged against him, been severe on those of the Lancastrian party who had fallen into his power, and had thereby excited their animosity against him. On the temporary reverse of Edward, from the union of Warwick with Clarence, he was apprehended, tried for cruelties said to have been exercised by him when deputy of Ireland, and was beheaded. In remarking on this event, Fuller, the church historian, pathetically adds, that "the axe did then, at one blow, cut off more learning than was in the heads of all the surviving nobility." Rivers enjoyed the smiles of fortune for a greater length of time, but at last, in 1483, persecuted and imprisoned by Richard Duke of Gloucester, (afterwards King of England,) he experienced the severe fate of Tiptoft.

Amongst the distinguished contemporaries of these two noblemen, who contributed to our vernacular literature, must be included the celebrated lawyer, Sir John Fortescue. I know not that either Tiptoft or Rivers, except as affording instances of noble authors, can be regarded as remarkable either in the history of our language, or our literature; but the treatise of Fortescue, entitled the "Difference between an Absolute and a Limited Monarchy," besides the reasoning and the Philosophy which it contains, is valuable also as an early example of a pure English style.

The Paston Letters.

The most curious monument of this age, not strictly, indeed, of our literature, but of our familiar style and domestic manners, is the collection of letters written by the different members of the Paston family during the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III. These letters are thus justly characterised, though with some degree of prolixity, by Fenn *, the editor of the collection.

"The artless writers of these letters here com-

* Preface, p. xv.

municate their private affairs, or relate the reports of the day; they tell their tale in the plain and uncouth phrase of the time; they aim not at shining by art or by eloquence, and bespeak credit by total carelessness of correction and ornament.

"The principal satisfaction of the reader will arise from two sources. He will hear the events of the moment from persons living at the time; and will see manners and usages of that age, painted in the most familiar language, undisguised and unadorned.

"The actors, as in Shakspeare's historic plays, will be by turns the victorious prince, the martial peers*, the defeated and sacrificed ministers, or persons of inferior rank.

"The meek and religious Henry, the restless Warwick, the loyal Beauforts, will attract attention, whether they become victorious, or sink in defeat. Edward himself will now force battle upon his foes, now hasten to his coronation, now post to

* Amongst the peers, Earl Rivers is frequently mentioned; amongst those of inferior rank, Sir John Falstaff and the bastard Falconbridge. I do not in any way mean to connect these names with Shakspeare.

the north to resist new foes; and each letter, like a change of decoration, will present him in a different scene."

It is from collections of private letters, whether those of Cicero, or of Peter of Blois, that we gather much of the most valuable and undesigned testimony regarding the habits, opinions, and sometimes even the costume, of the day in which they were written; and it is much to be regretted that the literature of ancient Greece includes no records of this description. Those who are curious in such matters, may collect from the "Paston Letters," that our French neighbours, even then, asserted their empire over ladies' dresses: gowns of French russet, and mystyrddevyllers (*moitié de velours*, half or bastard-velvet) are mentioned as objects, on the attainment of which, the happiness of the correspondent much depended. But our principal concern with the "Paston Letters" is with regard to the illustration which they afford of the taste of this age in English literature; and it is very creditable to the members of the worthy family by whom they were written, that as much solicitude is displayed by them in obtaining and preserving

their books, as in procuring hawks or fine dresses. In the inventory of the English books of John Paston, it is gratifying to observe, amongst numerous romances, and some few works on heraldry, "A Book of Troilus" (perhaps the "Troilus and Cresside" of Chaucer), and two copies of the "Parliament of Foules;" and this circumstance may be regarded as amongst the numerous proofs* which we possess, that, as late as the age of Spenser, these two works were amongst the most popular and esteemed productions of Chaucer's muse. In one of the letters, the "Temple of Glasse" is mentioned: this is incorrectly attributed by Fenn to Hawes. I do not speak of the disputed question as to the genuineness† of the "Temple of Glasse," now by common consent restored to Lydgate; but it is evident that the poem mentioned in the "Paston Letters" cannot be the work of Hawes, since none of the letters extend to his age. A poem, under the same title, occurs in catalogues

* See Reputation of Chaucer, chap. ii. of this volume. Pynson and De Worde followed the example of Caxton in printing the "Troilus." —Dibdin's Library Comp. p. 675—9.

† Warton's English Poetry, vol. iii. p. 46, notes; and Hallam's Introduct. vol. i. p. 432.

of works attributed both to Chaucer and to Lydgate; and of the latter writer it is expressly affirmed by Hawes, that—

"He made the bryght Temple of Glasse*."

Either, therefore, the work possessed by the Pastons was that of Lydgate, or may it not be possible that, in an age of careless transcribers, the "House of Fame" of Chaucer, in which is introduced a temple of glass, may have passed under this title?

Amongst other English books incidentally mentioned in the letters, occur "The Book of the Seven Sages," and "A Book † of the Siege of Thebes." The passage in which this latter work is mentioned, although rather more diffuse and rhetorical than the usual plain and unaffected style of these letters, is worth citing, as showing the qualities most valued by the country gentlemen of rank and station at that period. John Paston, writing to his brother, Sir John Paston, thus expresses himself‡:—

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* Pastime of Pleasure.

† By Lydgate. ‡ Letter xlvi.

"I pray you to recommend me, in my most humble wise, unto the good lordship of the most courteous*, gentlest, wisest, kindest, most companionable, freest, largest†, and most bounteous knight, my lord the Earl of Arran, whilk hath married the King's sister‡ of Scotland. Hereto, he is one of the lightest, delyverest §, best spoken, fairest archer; devoutest, most perfect, and truest to his lady, of all the knights I ever was acquainted with; so would God my lady liked me, as well as I do his person and most knightly conditions, with whom I pray you to be acquainted as you seemeth best: he is lodged at the George, in Lombard-street. He hath a book of my sister Anne's, of the 'Siege of Thebes;' when he hath done with it, he promised to deliver it to you: let Portland bring it home. Portland is lodged at the George, in Lombard-street, also."

The same correspondent, again addressing his

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* Most courteous and polished.

† Nearly synonymous with bounteous.

‡ Mary, daughter of James the Second.

§ The Squier of the Canterbury Tales is, "wonderly deliver;" *i. e.* active.

brother Sir John*, seems at least equally solicitous on a subject less intimately connected with letters; and probably, although he had not studied the dialogue of Ascham's Toxophilus, he fully admitted the principle there maintained against Philologus by the Archer, that learning would never prosper without some occasional relaxation:—

"Now think on me, my good lord, for if I have not an hawk in haste, I shall grow fat for default of labour, and dead for default of company, by my troth. No more; but I pray God send you all your desires, and me my mewed goss-hawk in haste, or, rather than fail, a soar-hawk. There is a grosser, dwelling right over against the well with two buckets, a little from St. Helen's, hath ever hawks to sell."

Caxton. The preceding extracts may be regarded as favourable specimens of the familiar English style of the day. The letters of the learned, many of which were professed treatises on specified subjects, continued, even to a much later date, to be

* Letter xlviii.

written in Latin; and in the days of Chaucer, private letters also were written, either in that language or in French*. The Pastons' letters may be considered as the earliest specimens of epistolary correspondence in a vernacular language, which England, or perhaps even Europe, possesses †.

It is hardly possible that any of the books in the possession of the Paston family should have been printed volumes. The first book printed in England was "The Game of Chess," dated 1474. But Caxton's earliest attempts in the recently invented, and, as it was by some deemed, magical art, were executed in the Netherlands‡: where he had translated, as well as printed, the French work entitled "Le Recuyell des Histoires de Troye," an undertaking to which he was prompted by his patroness, Margaret, sister to Edward the Fourth, and wife of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.

* Henry the Eighth's love-letters to Anne Boleyn were written in French.—Harl. Miscel. vol. i. p. 189.

† See Hallam's Introduct. vol. i. p. 228.

‡ Where he had established himself as agent for a London Mercers' Company.

The works to which Caxton devoted his newly-acquired art, may be classed generally under the following heads;—romances, fabulous chronicles, legends of saints, and translations from some of the more popular Latin classics. As an author, the station which Caxton occupies, in translating from the French, and in prefacing, as well as continuing, some of the works which he prints, is far from being inconsiderable. His influence, in short, upon English literature, is probably greater, and more important, than that of any single individual between the age of Chaucer and that of the Reformation. By the Reformation, as well as by the revival of classical literature, new tastes, and new subjects of inquiry were introduced; and the very art which Caxton himself had imparted to his country, was one of the principal causes of the overthrow of those literary tastes which he had laboured to cherish and to foster. To place this point more definitely before the reader, let us compare the sentiments of Caxton and of Ascham on the subject of chivalric and romantic works. Caxton, in the epilogue to his "Order of Chivalry," which he had translated from the French lan-

guage, thus breaks forth in praise of his beloved romances:—

"O ye knights of England! where is the custom and usage of noble chivalry, that was used in tho days? What do you now but go to the baynes*, and play at dice? and some, not well advised, use not honest and good rule, ageyn all order of knighthood. Leave this, leave it, and read the noble volumes of St. Grael, of Lancelot, of Galaud, of Tristram, of Perceforest, of Percyval, of Gawain, and many mo."

To those who know anything of the character† of the above-mentioned volumes, it will appear difficult to imagine what moral advantage Caxton proposed to derive from them; and what says Roger Ascham in his "Scholemaster?"

"In our forefathers' time, when papistry, as a standing pool, covered and overflowed all England, few books were read in our tongue, saving certain books of chivalry, as they said for pastime and pleasure, which, as some say, were made in monas-

* Baths.

† The prose romances are strongly distinguished from the older metrical compositions, by their licentious spirit, which scarcely appears at all in the latter.

teries, by idle monks, and canons; for example, *Morte Arthur*, the whole pleasure of which standeth in two points—in open man-slaughter* and bold bawdry. In which book, those be counted the noblest knights that kill most men without any quarrel, and commit foulest adulteries by subtlest shifts; as Sir Launcelot, with the wife of Arthur, his master; Sir Tristram, with the wife of King Mark, his uncle; Sir Lamerock, with the wife of King Lote, that was his own aunt. This is good stuff for wise men to laugh at, or honest men to take pleasure in!"

The preceding passages, extracted from the works of two of the most literary men of their respective days†, strikingly exemplify the change which had taken place in the age of the more modern author, as regards the estimation in which romances were held by the most cultivated and polished spirits. The revolution in literary tastes which took place between the age of Caxton and

* Just so romances are, for what else
Is in them all, but love and battles?

† I do not mean to place the literary attainments of Caxton and Ascham on a level *absolutely*, but only *relatively*, as regards their respective ages and opportunities. Caxton, in classical attainments, was not a Stephanus; but he was at least a literary, though not a learned printer.

that of Ascham, was owing to three principal causes—the Reformation, the revival of classical literature, and the introduction of the art of printing. It may, perhaps, be worth while to digress for a moment from the immediate subject of this review, to a slight notice of the effects which these three causes produced upon the national taste.

The Reformation, by engaging the attention of the learned in biblical and theological studies, struck the first blow at the extravagant and licentious fictions contained in such works as Lancelot, or Sir Tristram; and, at first, religion, which in practice can never be carried to excess, too exclusively occupied the province of literature. In the reign of Edward the Sixth, English poetry was confined to metrical versions of the Psalms, or of the Acts of the Apostles*. In that of Elizabeth, the first ardour of puritanical zeal had passed away, and classical learning promoted, as it had already been by Grocyn†, Linacre, Sir

* Warton's English Poetry, vol. iv. p. 14.

† It is unnecessary to observe, that Grocyn is chiefly distinguished as introducing the study of Greek at Oxford; Linacre, as his coadjutor in this respect, but no less as the reformer of the science of medicine.

Thomas More, and Dean Colet, was cultivated with spirit and success by Ascham, and encouraged by the example of his royal pupil. Thus a new, and a purer taste, was introduced into England. Greek literature, which, during previous ages, had been almost entirely unknown, was (though not without encountering vexatious opposition) diligently studied; translations from Greek, as well as from Latin classics, became numerous; and the new schools, one of the first of which was established by Dean Colet, and presided over by the grammarian Lylye, superseded those on the old monastic and scholastic system. The funds for the support of the new grammar schools were, in a great measure, derived from the spoils of the Catholics; and, in this respect, the Reformation and the revival of classical learning, may be said to have gone hand in hand in revolutionizing the national taste. But, as regards the progress of the human mind, the change in religion had a yet more important effect. It introduced a free, as well as a critical spirit of inquiry—an attention to matter rather than to words—to truth rather than to style, qualities which were unknown or unvalued in

the days of Catholicism. Classical literature added graces and ornaments, which had been disregarded, or rather rejected, by the reforming theology; and printing waited as a handmaid upon both, to put their commands into execution.

In the reign of Elizabeth a taste for ancient mythology, promoted by the revival of classical learning, possessed the whole nation. "When the queen," says Warton*, "paraded through a country town, almost every pageant was a pantheon. When she paid a visit at the house of any of her nobility, at entering the hall she was saluted by the Penates, and conducted to her privy-chamber by Mercury. Even the pastry-cooks were expert mythologists. At dinner, select transformations of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" were exhibited in confectionary; and the splendid iceing of an immense historic plum-cake, was embossed with a delicious basso-relievo of the destruction of Troy. In the afternoon, when she condescended to walk in the garden, the lake was covered with Tritons and Nereids; the pages of the family were con-

* Vol. iv. 323.

verted into wood-nymphs, who peeped from every bower; and the footmen gambolled over the lawns in the figure of satyrs."

Should the reader compare this elegant and humorous passage of Warton with Gascoyne's poem on the "princely pleasures of Kenilworth;" with Laneham's letter, giving an account of the entertainment of the Queen by the Earl of Leicester; or generally with the descriptions of state pageants and ceremonies contained in the pages of Hall, or Holingshed; he will probably think that the historian of English poetry has scarcely sufficiently noticed that incongruous union of classic with romantic fiction, which forms a distinguishing characteristic, as well of the shows and ceremonies, as of the literature of the middle ages. Gower and Chaucer, as we have seen, make Venus and Cupid the presidents of the Courts of Love. Chaucer introduces Pluto and Proserpine, as the king and queen of Fairy. Shakspeare gives to Theseus the title of Duke. These few instances will probably suggest more striking ones to the reader's mind*;

* In Shakspeare, the plays of "Cymbeline" and of "Troilus and Cressida" will afford numerous instances. In all these anachronisms and incongruities, Shakspeare did but follow his authorities.

so in the pageants of the days of Elizabeth, the Lady of the Lake and King Arthur figure amongst the heroes of the siege of Troy, or the classic divinities. It is, however, correctly true that a taste for classical literature had become, in the reign of Elizabeth, as it were a passion with the English nation. But the overheated ardour, inseparable from a new pursuit, shortly passed away; and while classical authors were soberly perused, or laboriously edited, by the more professed scholars of the age, the old romantic literature was cherished and revived by the genius of Sackville and Sidney, and yet more conspicuously by that of Spenser.

To return from these general reflections to the subject more immediately under our consideration, Caxton had few contemporaries as an English prose writer. Hardyng is rather a metrical than a prose chronicler; and Fabyan, though the earliest, is amongst the most credulous and trifling of the latter class.

The reign of Henry the Eighth is a conspicuous epoch in the annals of our prose literature. The translation of Froissart by Lord

Berners*; the history of Richard the Third by Sir Thomas More; the "New Year's Gift" and the "Itinerary" of Leland; and "The Governour," by Sir Thomas Elyot; all belong to this period. But the most important English works of this age are the two translations of the Bible by Tyndale and Coverdale.

More and Leland are more distinguished for their Latin than for their English works. The "Itinerary" of Leland possesses too much the character of a road-book to be cited as a specimen of English style; but probably this work, and the "Laborious Journey and Search for England's Antiquities, given as a New Year's Gift to King Henry the Eighth," contain (trifling as may be some of the details) more valuable and authentic matter than the entire compilation of the "Scriptores Britannici."

The most celebrated work of More is the philosophical romance, entitled the "Utopia," which,

* Lord Berners, when lieutenant of Calais, spent much of his time in translating from the French. Next to the translation of Froissart, the work by which he is most known to us, is his "Castle of Love," from the French Carcel D'Amour, itself a translation from the Spanish.

although now known to us in an English dress *, was written by the author himself in Latin; and therefore does not come within the province of this review of our vernacular literature. If the political opinions contained in that composition always express the serious opinions of the author (which it is scarcely possible† to imagine), they are as little creditable to his principles or judgment, as the "Republic" would be to those of Plato, or the "Prince" to those of Machiavel, were they viewed in the same serious light. As displaying his religious opinions, the most curious English work of More is "the dialogue" imagined to take place between himself and the tutor of a friend's children, on the subject of Catholic doctrines and practices, in which the worship of images, pilgrimages, and "many other things touching the pestilent sect of Luther and Tyndale," are fully treated; but the work of this distinguished

* First translated by Ralph Robinson, and afterwards by Bishop Burnet.

† As, for instance, the custom of the Utopians with regard to the equalisation of the number of children in families. Utopia, p. 191. Dibdin's edit.

man, which has attracted the most attention with more modern writers, is the "History of Edward V. and his brother, and of Richard III." The authenticity of this book, as regards the character of Richard, has given rise to a well-known controversy. The accuracy of More has been defended by Hume, and impugned by Carte, in his "History of England," by Walpole in his "Historic Doubts," and by Laing*, the historian of Scotland.

The following passage describing the birth, as well as the character of Richard, may, perhaps, afford the reader some criterion of the credibility of the traditionary accounts which in all probability formed the basis of More's narrative.

"Richard the Third, of whom we now entreat, was in wit and courage equal with either of them; in body and prowess, far under them both; little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard favoured of visage, and such as in states called warlye, in other men otherwise. He was malicious,

* See Appendix to the 12th vol. of Henry's Hist. of England.

wrathful, envious, and from his birth, ever froward. It is for truth reported, that the Dutchess, his mother, had so much ado in her travail, that she could not be delivered of him uncut; and that he came into the world with the feet forward, as men be borne outward; and (as the fame runneth) also *not untoothed*, (whether men of hatred report above the truth, or else that nature changed her course in his beginning, which, in the course of his life, many things unnaturally committed)."

In the preceding extract, if compared with the language of Caxton or his contemporaries, a sensible improvement in the English style will be observed; but, previous to the works of Raleigh, the English compositions of Ascham, more especially his "Toxophilus," afford the purest examples; as those of Raleigh are the most nervous and eloquent prior to Bacon.

The literary merit of Sidney has been variously estimated by critics. Horace Walpole was the first to impugn the high character, which by common consent he had hitherto enjoyed; and I Sidney.

am not aware that any very distinguished champion* has taken up, in his defence, the gauntlet thrown down by Walpole. All must admire the high and poetical tone of feeling which pervades his works; but it is not probable that any reader will often revert to his prolix pastoral romance, or discover in his "Defence of Poesy," erudition or powers of criticism much above those of ordinary men. The truth is, that the life of Sidney is more poetical than his works; the whole tenor of his conduct is romance brought into action; and we insensibly transfer the admiration we feel for his warm humanity and his nobleness of soul, to works, which, except as they are tinged with the poetry of his character, possess little literary value. Raleigh and Sidney occupy a place, though no very distinguished one, among the poets of this age; as Spenser does, in nearly an equal degree, amongst the prose writers.

Spenser. Spenser, as a prose writer, is known to us only as the author of "A View of the State of Ireland,

* See, however, Retrospective Review, vol. x. p. 43; in this Review the merits of the Defence of Poesy, the best of Sidney's works, is set off to the greatest advantage.

written dialogue-wise*," between Eudoxus and Irenæus, the subject of which is thus introduced to the reader.

"*Eudox.*—But if that countrey of Ireland, whence you lately came, be so goodly and commodious a soyl, as you report, I wonder that no course is taken, for the turning thereof to good uses, and reducing that nation to better government and civility.

"*Iren.*—Marry, so there have bin divers good plottes devised, and wise councils cast already about reformation of that realme; but they say, it is the fatall destiny of that land, that no purposes whatsoever, which are meant for her good, will prosper or take good effect; which, whether it proceed from the very genius of the soyle, or influence of the starres, or that Almighty God hath not yet appointed the time of her reformation, or that he reserveth her in this unquiet state still for some secret scourge, which shall by her come to England, it is hard to be knowne, but yet much to be feared."

* In adopting the form of a dialogue, Spenser followed the examples of More and Ascham.

Three principal causes are stated of the misery of the country—the laws, the customs, and the religion. Few, probably, in the present day, will attribute the disturbed state of Ireland to the old Brehon laws, and not very many to the similarity traced by Spenser between the customs of the Scythians, and those of the wild Irish. On the whole, religion still continues to be the chief source of mischief: "they be all papists by profession." These papists are represented by Irenæus to be ignorant of the grounds of their faith. Eudoxus inquires, why not instruct them? To this Irenæus observes, that "this needeth quiet times," and "that it is ill time to preach among swords."

"*Eudox.*—But is there no law or ordinaunce to meet this mischiefe?

"*Iren.*—Yes, it seems it hath; for there is a statute there enacted in Ireland, which seems to have been grounded on a good meaning, that whatsoever Englishman of good conversation and sufficiency shall be brought unto any of the bishoppes, and nominated unto any living within their diocese that is presently voyde, that he shall (without con-

tradiction), be admitted thereunto before any Irish.

"*Eudox.*—This surely is a very good law."

The question at issue is not brought much beyond this point by the disputants, nor is it finally resolved even in the present day. From a subject which awakes anxious thoughts with all, and in some breasts even unkindly feelings, the reader will turn with gratification to the poetry of Spenser and his predecessors.

English poetry of this period.

Between the age of Barclay, Hawes, and Skelton, and that of Spenser, scarcely any names of eminence occur in the annals of our poetry, except those of Surrey and Sackville. Surrey, who, in his unfortunate fate, as well as in his devotion to literature, affords a parallel to two noble authors of an older day, Tiptoft and Rivers, devotes his muse, in the true spirit of the age, to his mistress. In this respect he follows the general practice of the mediæval poets. Dante is conducted to paradise by his Beatrice; Petrarch either suffers the torments of "hell upon earth," or enjoys the pleasures of a paradise, as his Laura smiles or frowns. Chaucer, after a tedious apprenticeship

in the court of Love, is admitted to the presence of his Rosial. Surrey, in the spirit of Petrarch, exercises his muse on the beauties and virtues of his Geraldine. But the merits of Surrey are not to be sought for solely in his sonnets; amongst the variety of religious poems common in his age, his paraphrases* of part of Ecclesiastes and of some of the Psalms, are distinguished for the grace of their diction, as well as for their poetical spirit. The poem in which, when a prisoner in Windsor Castle, he grieves for the death of Richmond, and calls to mind the pleasure which he there once enjoyed with the friend of his youth, will remind the reader of Chaucer's "Dutchesse," in which rural imagery is embellished by a lively description of the chase. The following stanza will afford a favourable specimen of Surrey's style:—

The wild forest, the clothed holts with grene;
With reins availed † and swift ybreathed horse,
With cry of hounds, and merry blasts between,
Where we did chase the fearful hart of force.

* Nott's edit. vol. i. 66. For a particular account of Surrey and Wyatt, see Warton, vol. iii., and Dr. Nott's two quarto volumes.

† So Shakspeare—

"Vailing their high tops lower than their ribs."

In the catalogue of our noble authors, the next in chronological order to Surrey is Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, the author of the Induction to the "Mirror for Magistrates," and of "Ferrex and Porrex *," generally accounted our earliest tragic drama.

In the following and concluding chapter, a brief account will be attempted of the origin and progress of English dramatic compositions—a species of literature by which the last age of our mediæval poetry is distinguished from any preceding period. It will then be necessary again to allude to the name of Sackville; on the present occasion he will be considered solely as the author of the above-mentioned induction.

The "Mirror for Magistrates" is a long historical or legendary poem, the scheme of which is borrowed from Bocaccio's Latin work, "De Casibus Principum," which had been translated by Lydgate. It is executed by various poets, of very unequal merit, and at different periods, extending from a date rather prior to Spenser, into the reign

* Lord Buckhurst wrote only the two last acts of this play: the three first were composed by Thomas Norton. Biograph. Brit., art. Sackville.

of James the First. The earliest and the most poetical portion of this work is the Induction, or descent into an imaginary or classical hell (the scene of the poem), by Sackville; a production the more worthy of notice because, with the exception, perhaps, of the allegorical images of Chaucer's Knight's Tale, it affords the most striking instances of allegorical description previous to Spenser.

The following passages are much in the spirit of that great poet:—

> And first within the porch and jaws of hell
> Sat deep Remorse of Conscience, all bespent
> With tears; and to herself oft would she tell
> Her wretchedness, and cursing never stent,
> To sob and sigh, but ever thus lament
> With thoughtful care; as she that, all in vain,
> Would wear and waste continually in pain:
>
> Her eyes unstedfast, rolling here and there,
> Whirl'd on each place, as place that vengeance brought;
> So was her mind continually in fear,
> Tost and tormented with the tedious thought
> Of those detested crimes which she had wrought;
> With dreadful cheer *, and looks thrown to the sky,
> Wishing for death, and yet she could not die.

* Countenance.

And after a few intermediate stanzas—

By him lay heavy SLEEP, the cousin of Death,
Flat on the ground, and still as any stone,
A very corpse, save yielding forth a breath;
Small keep took he, whom Fortune frowned on,
Or whom she lifted up into the throne
Of high renown, but, as a living death,
So dead alive, of life he drew the breath.

The body's rest, the quiet of the heart,
The travel's ease, the still night's fear was he,
And of our life on earth the better part;
Rever of sight, and yet in whom we see
Things oft that tyde, and oft that never be;
Without respect esteeming equally
King Crœsus' pomp, and Irus' poverty.

And next in order sad OLD AGE we found,
His beard all hoar, his eyes hollow and blind;
With drooping cheer still poring on the ground,
As on the place where nature him assigned
To rest, when that the sisters had untwin'd
His vital thread, and ended with their knife
The fleeting course of fast-declining life.

The poet is conducted to his imaginary hell by Sorrow. In this respect, as also in the historical characters which are supposed to pass in review before him, the poem is a close imitation of the Commedia of Dante.

The first of these characters who makes his appearance is Henry Duke of Buckingham, the partisan of Richard the Third. The Legend of Buckingham is the only historical portion of the work executed by Sackville. If in the poetry of Surrey we discover a marked improvement on the works of almost every preceding poet, as regards purity of style and expression, Sackville is excelled in vigour of imagination, and in descriptive powers, by Chaucer alone, of all his predecessors.

By Spenser, allegorical descriptions, which first appear in modern poetry in the "Roman de la Rose," and which form the distinguishing excellence of Sackville, were carried to the highest degree of perfection. Except as exhibiting a peculiar stanza *, the "Faery Queene" cannot be regarded as an innovation in the art of poetry. The moral allegory which forms the general scheme of the poem, the characters, and even the diction, all belong to a previous age. In the choice

* This stanza has been adopted by Shenstone in his "Schoolmistress," by Beattie in his "Minstrel," and by Byron in his "Childe Harold;" but Thomson alone, in his "Castle of Indolence," has been a successful imitator of the allegorical imagery of Spenser.

of a theme, and of characters, borrowed from the old romances, Spenser follows the example of Ariosto. But he is an imitator of the Italian poet, not merely in the general plan of his work, but also in many of his descriptions and images. Thus the Duessa of the "Faery Queene" is a copy of the Alcina of the "Orlando Furioso:" and Merlin, the enchanter, common to both poems, discovers to Britomart, as well as to Bradamante, her future progeny. These are merely two, of a great variety of instances, which might be adduced to prove the same point. Ariosto, however, is no more to be regarded as an inventor of his chivalric characters, or enchanting stories, than is Spenser. The question very naturally addressed by Cardinal D'Este to the Italian poet, "Dove mai avete préso tante coglionerie?" might be answered, in a very great measure, by referring either to the poetry of Pulci or Boiardo, or to the yet older romances. So Spenser borrows many of the incidents and characters of his great work from the "Morte Arthur," or the "Seven Champions of Christendom:" and even the plan of his poem has, in part, as Warton has observed, been de-

rived from the latter prose fiction. "The circumstance," says Warton, "of each of Spenser's twelve knights departing from one place by a different way, to perform a different adventure, exactly resembles that of the seven knights entering upon their several expeditions, in the well-known romance."

In powers of picturesque description, Ariosto will bear no comparison with Spenser; if we leave our thoughts at liberty to ramble over the beauties of the "Faery Queene," the Cave of Morpheus, or that of Despair, the sombre image of the sage Archimago, or the buoyant and graceful figure of Sir Tristram, forthwith rise before us. In Ariosto, it is the pathos of his episodes, or the magic and enchantment, through which, in his main story (if it may so be called), we are transported to an ideal world, that most attracts us; we seek the touching tales of Ginevra, or Olympia; we soar aloft with Astolpho on the hippogriff, or start at the thrilling blast of Orlando's horn.

If there is sublimity in the Italian poet, it must be sought for in magic and enchantment; and it arises

more from the ideal terror attributed by romance to supernatural agents, than from the creations of the poet. With Ariosto, it is but an easy step from the sublime to the ludicrous; and in many instances these two heterogeneous qualities are so intermingled as to give rise to the idea, that the intention of the poet is rather satire than serious description. In the "Faery Queene" there are no traces of that comic vein, which, with almost every other great poet, forms a marked and essential constituent in the poetical character. Even in those beautiful exordiums, which, in the great works of the two poets, form distinguishing and characteristic ornaments, our English poet preserves a more severe and dignified tone than does "that famous Tuscan penne."

It has been said that the poetry of the "Faery Queene" does not represent the manners, habits, and opinions of real life; but what poetry of a serious nature ever does so literally, and exactly? In the eclogues of Spenser himself, it may be answered, there is at least an attempt made towards this end; and what is the consequence? that in the midst of the enjoyment of various inci-

dental beauties, we are occasionally not a little disturbed by the clownish sentiments and uncouth diction of Hobbinol or Digon Davie. Compare the poetical shepherds of Theocritus, or Virgil, with the rustics of Spenser, or Allan Ramsay. In the latter instances we find such an exact imitation of ordinary nature, as is incompatible with poetry, unless that poetry be of a satiric or comic kind. The Iliad (and even, though in a less degree, the Odyssey) is an embellishment, not an actual representation, of real life. So the Faery Queene exemplifies, or rather exaggerates, the habits and opinions of the feudal knight, as the Iliad does those of the ancient chieftain.

The chief difference between these two poems, considered as representations of actual life, consists in this; that in the Iliad, contemporary manners and opinions are exhibited, in the Fairy Queene those of an age previous to that of the poet. If it is said, that the heroes of Spenser, Christians, and wearing the badge of crusading knights, are represented as under the influence of enchantments, it should be remembered that the Christians, not

perhaps of Spenser's day, but of the age of the romances from which he borrows, had a faith in magic, fully equal to their trust in religion; and, to go back to the days of Bede, we find in his writings complaints that, in times of sickness, the people had recourse to incantations, in preference to the holy sacrament. The mythology, in short, of a system of romance, which had its origin in heathen times, is grounded on magic, or other popular superstitions; and if there is any thing incongruous in the work of Spenser, it is his occasional allusion to Christianity. In other respects the poem of Spenser is a pure Gothic structure, undisturbed by the introduction of classic or Christian ornaments: and in this purity and unity of his edifice the author of the "Faery Queene" is distinguished from almost every other great poet subsequent to the classic ages of Greece and Rome;—from Dante, from Chaucer, from the mediæval poets generally, and lastly, from Milton. The degree, indeed, in which the mind of Milton appears to have been still occupied with romance, as well as with classical mythology, even when employed in treating of a religious theme, is not

a little remarkable; but it is well known that the poet* at one time contemplated a work on

> What resounds
> In fable or romance of Uther's son,
> Girt with armorie, and with British knights.

And this perhaps may account for his allusion to

> Damsels met in forests wide
> By knights of Logris and of Lyonnes,
> Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.

One of the most gratifying circumstances connected with the period of the history of our literature reviewed in this chapter, is the interest which men of high birth and political influence seem to have taken in literary pursuits. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, was a munificent patron of learning. Tiptoft and Rivers were also authors themselves. Skelton was patronised by Algernon Percy. Surrey and Sackville were among the most distinguished poets of their age; but, whether owing to a prevailing taste for theological pursuit, the prevalence of classical studies, or the engrossing in-

* Life of Milton, p. lxiv., Hawkins's edit.

terest of politics and state affairs, it does not appear that Spenser met with that encouragement and patronage to which his high qualities as a poet would have justly entitled him. Without giving implicit credence to the alledged parsimony of Burleigh, (who is said to have objected to a gratuity of a hundred pounds to Spenser, as too high a remuneration *for a song*,) it is certain, from a variety of evidence, that the age of Spenser was not one * in which poets were highly favoured at court. Puttenham, publishing his "Arte of Poetrie" in 1589, writes a chapter† on the following subject:—"In what reputation poesie and poets were in old time with princes, and otherwise generally, and how they be now contemptible, and for what causes;" and he cites the examples of Jehan of Mehune, Guillaume of Lorris, and Geoffray Chaucer, as poets who were favoured and protected by the monarchs of their age. Spenser, in his humorous "Mother Hubberd's Tale" seems

* The very circumstance of Sir Philip Sidney's having deemed it necessary to undertake a Defence of Poesy, goes to prove this point.

† Chap. viii.

evidently to allude to his own ill-fortune, in the following well-known lines:—

Full little knowest thou that hast not tride,
What hell it is in suing long to bide,
To lose good days in pensive discontent;
To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow;
To feed on hope, to pine with feare and sorrow;
To have thy prince's grace, yet want her peere's *;
To have thy asking, yet wait many yeeres;
To eate thy heart through comfortless despaire;
To fawne, to crouche, to waite, to ride, to ronne;
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

And in one of the eclogues of his "Shepheard's Callendar"—

But, ah! Mecænas is yclad in clay,
And great Augustus long ago is dead;
And all the worthies liggen wrapt in lead,
That matter made for poets on to play.

During the latter years of Spenser's life †, and during the early portion of the reign of James the First, a general taste for English literature, which seems previously to have somewhat declined,

* Perhaps alluding to Burleigh.

† Spenser died in the year 1600.

was revived and disseminated by the powerful influence of the drama.—A review of the above-mentioned period, which I have ventured to regard as the last age of old English literature, will form the subject of my concluding essay, and will present to our consideration, besides the drama, other departments of literature which had hitherto been unknown, and which distinguish this period from all those which preceded it.

CHAPTER VIII.

REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF SHAKSPEARE.

PART I.—THE DRAMA.

Origin of the Drama.

THE intimate connection which in rude ages subsists between literature and religion, is strikingly illustrated in the history of the drama. The origin and progress of dramatic compositions in the ancient world, is, owing to the total inattention of the early Greek authors to literary history, a subject involved in much obscurity; and we possess no means of distinctly tracing the steps by which scenic performances attained the regular and methodised form which they had acquired in the most brilliant æra of Athenian and Sicilian literature. All existing evidence, however, goes to prove that tragedies and comedies had their origin in religious feasts and ceremonies. The

origin of the ludicrous and of the serious drama does not appear to have been distinct, but rather one and the same; and the pantomimic mummeries of dumb show (varied perhaps by alternate songs, which gave birth to the chorus of the Greek stage) probably exhibited that incongruous, yet not unpleasing, mixture of the serious and the ludicrous, which, though it was banished from the classic theatre of the ancients, is perceptible in our own drama to a comparatively late period, and is observable more particularly in the dramas of Shakspeare himself. To the chorus, which, as is evident from many circumstances *, was the most ancient department of the Greek drama, a dialogue was added, and, lastly, a plot.

Horace, in one of his epistles, informs us, that traces of those rustic mummeries, which, previous to their acquaintance with Greek literature,

* In Æschylus, the oldest of the three great extant tragic poets, the chorus bears a much greater proportion, both in length and in importance, to the dialogue, than it does in the plays of Sophocles or Euripides, where the chorus is often but remotely connected with the story. Many of the ancient dramas, comedies as well as tragedies, derive their titles from the chorus, as if the dialogue were comparatively insignificant; and in the new Greek comedy, the chorus was altogether discontinued.

formed the only theatre of the Romans, still existed in his day; and, from all that we can collect of the history of early Roman literature, it seems very clear that a kind of rude religious drama, derived to them either from the Etruscans, the Oscans, or others of their more polished neighbours, was known to the Romans, long before they adopted the classic models of the Greek stage.

English Drama previous to Shakspeare.

In like manner, the origin of the modern drama of Europe is to be traced to a religious source. The opinion of Voltaire, that the religious dramas, known in the west of Europe by the titles of miracle-plays and mysteries, first came from Constantinople, has been generally adopted. In the fourth century it was, that Gregory of Nanzianzen, with a view of banishing from the stage the classic and Pagan drama, substituted for the plays of Philemon or Menander, his own sacred dialogues, the subjects of which were borrowed from the Old or New Testament. In what country of Europe, whether in Italy or in England, the mysteries were first known, is a moot point in literary history; but we have the contemporary authority of Fitz-

tephen, secretary to Archbishop Becket, for affirming, that, in the reign of Henry the Second, they formed one of the principal amusements of the London citizens. In that period, the language in which the miracle-plays were composed or recited, was Latin *; a scaffold was the stage; and parish clerks, university scholars, or the children of the Latin and conventual schools, were the actors: traces of all which practices are discoverable in England as late as the close of the sixteenth century.

But from about the middle of the fourteenth century, to the most brilliant æra of English dramatic literature, a transition had been gradually taking place from these earlier customs to those which prevailed in the Elizabethan period. About the middle of the last-mentioned century the English language (as appears from a single extant specimen †) began to be adopted in dramatic com-

* One reason, perhaps the chief, why religious dramas continued to be recited in Latin long after English had become the language of literature, was the objection which the Popes and the Catholic clergy had to the profanation of sacred subjects, by exhibiting them in a vernacular dialect.

† Hallam's Introduct. to Lit. vol. i. 296.

positions. The language of the celebrated "Chester Mysteries," as we now read them, belongs to the close of the sixteenth century *; but there can hardly exist any doubt that they are modernized from an older English style. Towards the close of the fourteenth century the moralities †, so called because they consisted of personifications of moral qualities, first made their appearance: the sacred and Scripture subjects, although often much mixed up with the moralities, were gradually disused, and something of a plot or fable was occasionally introduced.

During the whole of the fifteenth century, (perhaps the most barren period in the annals of our literature) the mysteries, the basis of which consisted in a pantomimic representation of Scripture subjects; and the moralities, which generally united those subjects with moral personifications, continued to be the only scenic performances. The mysteries were most frequently represented in large trading towns, such as Coventry, Chester, or York, whither a concourse of spectators was

* Baker's Biog. Dram. vol. ii. 95, where specimens are given.

† Dodsley's Preface to Old Plays, p. xliv.

brought together by the occasion of a fair; and the trading companies of those cities, finding that the attraction of dramatic amusements swelled the number of their customers*, took upon themselves the management of the exhibitions, and performed the part of actors. At Chester, "Every company† had his pagiante, or parte, which pagiantes were a highe scaffolde with two rowmes, a higher and a lower, upon 4 wheeles. In the lower they apparelled themselves; in the higher rowme they played, being all open to the tope, that all beholders might heare and see them. The places where they played them was in every streete. They begane first at the Abay gates, and when the pagiante was played, it was wheeled to the High Cross, before the mayor, and so to every streete; and so every streete had a pagiante playing before them, till all the pagiantes for the

* Dugdale, writing in 1656, and mentioning the Coventry mysteries, says, that "the pageants played therein (at Coventry, before the Reformation and the suppression of the monasteries), occasioning very great confluence of people from far and near, were of no small benefit thereto."—Hist. of Warwickshire, p. 116.

† Archdeacon Rogers' MSS. Harl. 1948, apud Ormerod's History of Cheshire, p. 296—302. This extract is derived from Hone's Preface to Ancient Mysteries, p. v.

daye appointed were played; and when one pagiante was neere ended, worde was broughte from streete to streete, that soe they might come in place thereof exceeding orderlye; and all the streetes had their pagiante afore them, all at one time, playing together; to se which playes was great resorte; and also scaffoldes and stages made in the streetes, in those places wheare they determined to playe their pagiantes."

During the sixteenth century, the mysteries, owing in a great measure to the counteracting influence of the Reformation, were gradually disused; though an instance of these mockeries of sacred subjects occurs as late as the reign of James the First, when Christ's Passion was played on Good-Friday *. But the moralities still kept their ground; and Bale, the biographer, a celebrated advocate for the Protestant cause, was himself an author †. John Heywood, a contemporary with Bale, but of a very different religious persuasion, may be regarded as the first who

* Prynne's Histriomastix, quarto, 1633, p. 117.

† For a specimen of Bale's dramatic compositions, see Harleian Misc. vol. i. p. 202.

introduced national characters on the comic stage. His compositions * are, however, mere dialogues, without the slightest attempt at plot or action.

The age of Bale and Heywood † may, on the whole, be regarded as an epoch in the history of our dramatic literature. In the stage itself, and in the form of the theatre, some improvement begins to be perceptible about this period. While theatrical performances continued to be exclusively on religious subjects, and when the actors were either friars, monks, parish clerks, university scholars, or ‡ school-children, (that is, either the clergy themselves or their dependants,) sometimes the very church itself, but more frequently its immediate neighbourhood, was the scene of the performance. About the middle of the sixteenth century, the separation which took

* See his "Four P.'s," Dodsley's Old Plays, vol. i. The titles of his other dialogues may be found either in Wood's Athenæ or in Baker's Biog. Dram., articles Heywood.

† John Heywood, in distinction to Thomas Heywood, the dramatist, and the author of the "Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels," is usually styled the Epigrammatist. John Heywood was jester to Henry the Eighth, and therefore a contemporary of Wolsey's celebrated Patch.

‡ These last retained their ground for long afterwards, as will be presently noticed.

place between religion and the subjects of the drama, produced a correspondent change in the stage. The moveable scaffolds, on which the Absolons of their day used to enact the ranting part of Herod *, and the Thespian waggons of the Chester trading companies, were exchanged for the inn-yard, which, although still a temporary theatre, may be considered as a considerable step towards the form of our modern play-houses. The galleries, which were built round the court of the inn, gave the name to one of the least aristocratic situations of the regular theatre †; while the ground of the yard itself (whence the term groundlings, used by Shakspeare and his contemporaries) also contained the inferior classes. The rooms, as the boxes are called by Decker ‡ and others, were the choicest seats of all, especially those situated under the galleries, which corresponded with

* Hence Hamlet's expression, "It out-Herods Herod;" meaning that the player ranted more extravagantly than those who played the part of Herod.

† Bishop Hall, Satires, book i. sat. 3, speaks of the "gazing scaffolders," as the occupants of the gallery were in his day called, as a contemptible and low part of the audience.

‡ Gull's Hornbook, c. vi.

what, in the present language of the play-house, is termed the dress-circle.

The last days of Bale and Heywood may be regarded as contemporaneous with the birth of regular tragedy and comedy. In 1563 died the Protestant Bale; in 1565 the Catholic Heywood died at Mechlin, in Brabant, whither he had retired, fearing that the cruelties of the bloody Mary might be retaliated upon the Catholics under her Protestant successor. In 1562 was first represented the tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex, and about 1560 Gammer Gurton's Needle made its appearance on the stage. The latter play, our first regular comedy, is laughable only from the extreme absurdity of the plot, which turns upon the loss of a needle, and its fortunate discovery in the nether garments of a man; the former is remarkable chiefly as the earliest example we possess of the historical drama, which Shakspeare carried to the highest degree of perfection.

Our historic drama resembles that of the Greeks, only as it is based upon the most popular subjects of national history: to the unity of plot,

which, by the great arbiter of classic criticism, was deemed the most essential quality of a perfect tragedy, our early historical dramatists paid little attention; and in very many instances the catastrophe, or rather the close of the performance, is anything rather than tragical. Add to this, that, in the English historic drama, there is a frequent interruption of the pathetic scenes, not by the grave admonitions of a Greek chorus, but by humorous and comic passages, sometimes by the low buffoonery of clowns. Histories, in short, as they were styled, form, in the British drama, a class distinct from tragedies, though these latter also often partake of the irregularities of the historic plays. Critics, who fix their thoughts rather on theoretical than practical excellence, may, if they please, condemn these irregularities as faults;—Frenchmen may elevate themselves upon the shoulders of Aristotle, and rave about the unities from their professorial chairs; and the lovers of the sublime may contend against the profanation of tragic scenes by the introduction of playful and humorous dialogues;—the "wood-notes wild" of Shakspeare will still

continue to please and to captivate, whilst the "learned sock" of Jonson will be comparatively disregarded.

The plot of the "Ferrex and Porrex" turns upon the misfortunes which arise to the kingdom of Britain from the unhappy dissensions of Ferrex and Porrex, the two sons of King Gorboduc. The incidents are sufficiently tragical to supply material for five or six dramas; but here the pathos ends: from beginning to end all is insipidity; and it will be pleasing to the admirers of Sackville, the spirited author of the Induction to the Mirror for Magistrates, to be reminded, that one Thomas Norton was the composer of the three first acts * of this play, while Sackville was guilty only of the two last. Sidney, who, throughout his Defense of Poesy, displays rather an impassioned admiration of the Muses, than any very acute or discriminating powers of criticism, characterises this play as "full of stately and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style, and full of notable moralitie." This, perhaps, is no very high commendation, though intended as

* Biog. Dram.

such; yet it must be confessed, that, if compared with previous dramas, not with poetry in general, the "Ferrex and Porrex" must be regarded as an improvement on preceding compositions, since it was the first play in which heroic blank verse, and moral sentiments in natural language, were introduced into dramatic compositions. In one respect only is the taste and practice of the preceding age observed in this drama: it was deemed necessary to amuse the audience between the acts, not merely, according to the more modern custom, with instrumental music, but also with a "domme shewe *," giving an allegorical interpretation of the moral design of the story. Between the date of this play and that of the earliest of Shakspeare's works, a variety of dramas made their appearance, by different authors, of various degrees of merit; the most distinguished of whom are George Peele and Christopher Marlowe.

Shakspeare. The impossibility of strictly classifying the dramatic works of Shakspeare, will be evident to the most superficial observer. In a very loose and general way, they might be mentioned under

* See the play in Dodsley's Collection, vol. i.

three principal heads—Histories, Tragedies, and Comedies; but it is evident, at first sight, that this division is any thing rather than logical. The tragedies, as, for instance, Lear, Cymbeline, or Hamlet, often rest on an historical basis: some again of the histories, as the two parts of Henry the Fourth, are so interlarded, or rather enlivened, with humorous scenes and characters, that it is difficult to determine whether to class them as comedies or serious dramas. On the other hand, the comedies are so raised and exalted (more especially in As You Like It, if, indeed, for want of place elsewhere, it be allowable to rank this play as a comedy) by passages of exquisite pathos and elevated sentiment, that they possess all the dignity of tragedy. Besides this, there is one grand and principal department of the all-comprising genius of Shakspeare, which this threefold division leaves altogether untouched —those unearthly scenes—that land of fairies and magicians, to which, himself a magician, he conducts us, when,

> As imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen

Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Were we to seek for the most perfect and triumphant examples of Shakspeare's art, those, in short, of his works where the heart of the reader is most led captive, and his judgment most dazzled; we should turn to the trials of female constancy, various in themselves, and as variously supported, of Juliet, Desdemona, or Imogen; to the domestic woes, and the consequent madness of Lear; or to Hamlet; who, like Orestes, having been incited to the blackest crimes by the admonitions of a supernatural agency *, avenges a royal father's murder, by dipping his hands in the blood of an Egisthus and a Clytemnestra. But, if we would select those

* Orestes, by the oracle of Apollo.

The similarity of Shakspeare to Æschylus is not confined to this striking coincidence in the plots of the "Coëphoræ" and of "Hamlet;" the frequent employment of supernatural agency, (which, in the days of Shakspeare, was scarcely less devoutly a matter of belief, than in those of Æschylus,) and the boldness, almost amounting to extravagance, of their metaphors, show that the same tastes and the same genius animated both the tragic dramatists. I never can read the expression, *ανηριθμον*, applied to the ocean in the "Prometheus," without recurring in thought to Shakspeare's "multitudinous sea." In the same drama, the words of Macbeth, "for fear the very stones prate of my whereabout," are very similar to those of the Watchman in the Agamemnon: *οἶκος δ' αὐτὸς, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι, σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν.*

of Shakspeare's dramas, which, as whole and entire works, most strictly emanate from his own creative mind, we must seek either those scenes, where, as in the Tempest or in the Midsummer Night's Dream, supernatural agency assumes a milder form; or those humorous and comic dialogues, which, scattered as they are profusely in * both the last-mentioned dramas, form still more essentially the basis of the Twelfth Night and the Merry Wives of Windsor. In the historical dramas, it will not be the invention of the poet, nor always the extraordinary vigour of his language (for in some few well-known instances †,

* Even "Macbeth" is not entirely without those familiar passages, (see the Porter's soliloquy, act ii. sc. 3,) with which almost every other play of Shakspeare abounds. The horrors of this tragedy are varied, in one well-known instance, by the most peaceful and tranquil rural imagery, act i. sc. 6.

† The description of Cleopatra sailing on the Cydnus, from Sir Thomas North's Plutarch; the speech of Queen Catherine at her trial, either from Hollinshed or Cavendish's Life of Wolsey. Many passages of Coriolanus are merely versified from North. Lydgate's Troy book, North's Plutarch, Hollinshed, Painter's novels, and generally translations of Italian novels, formed the most important part of Shakspeare's library. Old songs, ballads, and plays, filled the upper shelves. According to Steevens, "Hall, Hollinshed, Stowe, &c. are followed, not only in the conduct, but sometimes in the very expressions, throughout the following historical dramas, viz. Macbeth, King

this is borrowed verbatim from his originals) which will most command our admiration; but the wonderful, and almost intuitive perception, of what constitutes the sublime or poetical materials of an historical tale, which enables him to raise a glorious edifice, upon a meagre and inconsiderable foundation. But in the magic of the Tempest, in the fairy scenes of the Midsummer Night's Dream, and, generally, in all his comic passages and dialogues, the poet is the creator, not merely of the structure, but of the very materials of which that structure is composed.

The characters of Shakspeare's historical plays are, generally speaking, of no definite age or nation; in some cases indeed, owing to the anachronisms which, whether through carelessness* or design, he adopted out of the original sources of his

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John, Richard II., Henry IV. two parts, Henry V., Henry VI. three parts, Richard III., and Henry VIII."

* What now appears to us carelessness or ignorance in the poet, was, in fact, the general fault of the age. Jonson, perhaps, was the only dramatist of this age critically learned enough to enter into the difference of the manners of different ages. The audience, however cultivated, was probably better pleased with Shakspeare's ignorance than with Jonson's learning. The anachronisms of Shakspeare appear most strikingly in "Troilus and Cressida," and in "Cymbeline."

stories, they appear to belong to several nations and epochs at once; but a great variety of his comic characters are strictly national, and belong to his own day. They include the foppish and fantastic courtier, with his euphuisms and affected Italianated phraseology; the silly country justice; the ignorant country curate; the conceited pedant; domestic servants (shrewd, or simple; some real fools, some affected, and altogether of such variety, as to form in themselves a large class among the comic characters of the poet,) and lastly, downright rustic boors.

Euphuism, as it was styled after the title of the celebrated work of John Lilly, consisted in an affected habit of interlarding plain English with terms derived from Spanish or Italian; an accomplishment which was considered by the fops of the age of Shakspeare, to be a distinguishing characteristic of a travelled man, and a scholar. This affectation had already been censured by Ascham and other writers; and it formed a frequent subject of ridicule with Shakspeare. The most finished of Shakspeare's Euphuists is Don Armado, the acknowledged prototype of Scott's Sir Piercie

Shafton, who in the condescending courtship which he pays to Mysie Happer, closely follows the behaviour of Armado to Jaquenetta *. Holofernes the conceited schoolmaster, and Sir Nathaniel the silly curate, though they chiefly entertain us with their ridiculous rhymes, and with affectations of speech, more peculiar to their own professional characters, occasionally attempt the euphuism of the anglicized Spaniard. They are, however, but mere rustic imitators; while Armado, like Osric, is a finished master of the art, without a Hamlet at hand to foil him at his own weapons. In Jonson's comedies, perhaps the nearest approach to the character of a professed Euphuist, is the fantastical and vain-glorious Puntarvolo, "wholly consecrated† to singularity," and resolved, " in spite of public derision, to stick to his own particular fashion,

* See Preface to " Monastery." There is an equally close, though I believe unacknowledged, resemblance between Timon of Athens and Elshender the Recluse; both retire from the world while in the possession of rank and wealth, from a disgust at the ingratitude and treachery of flatterers. Timon lives in a cave as wild as Elshie's hut; and his speech to the robbers who visit him there is very similar to the address of the dwarf to Westburnflat.

† Characters of the Persons, prefixed to " Every Man Out of his Humour."

phrase, and gesture." But Bobadil, the Paul's man, frequently interlards his Thrasonical diction, and his new-fashionate oaths, with a due proportion of Spanish and Italian phrases.

Country justices, and their impotent minions the constables, as well as occasionally their clerks, form a frequent subject of ridicule with the dramatists of this age. Jonson's Overdo, Massinger's Greedy, and Shakspeare's Shallow and Silence, claim a well-earned title to their respective names. The merry Clement, and his clerk Formal, form nearly a solitary exception to the silly bustling importance, or clownish stupidity, usually attributed to this class. Clement has all the heartiness, without any of the boorishness or ignorance, of Squire Western.

National characters of Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Jonson.

The national characters of Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Jonson, extend through nearly the same ranks of society, from the knight to the rustic clown: only with this distinction on the surface, that Chaucer's Knight is no comic character, but, according to the notions of the age, as accomplished a gentleman as Hamlet himself. Jonson exhibits some few of Chaucer's characters which do not

make their appearance in the comedies of Shakspeare, as, for instance, the Alchemist, and the Precisian or * Puritan; but, in both instances, with considerable shades of difference; the Alchemist of Jonson being a professional juggler and impostor, and carrying on no other trade; that of Chaucer having merely temporarily exchanged his usual religious frauds for those of alchemy. The Puritan, in the days of Jonson, was a more formal, precise, and hypocritical creature, than the Bible-man or Wickliffite; but the main difference between these characters as exhibited by the two poets, arose from the different feelings entertained by each towards the originals from which he drew. The Precisian in Jonson's age, was the avowed and open enemy of the dramatists, and consequently was treated by them with retaliating severity. The great reformer of the fourteenth century, was professedly admired and followed by the elder poet; and, therefore, with the exception of a few

* "Bartholomew Fair" was a favourite play with Charles the Second, owing to the ridicule thrown upon the characters of the Banbury-man or Puritan, Zeal-of-the-land Busy, and the object of his affections, Dame Purecraft.

expressions which fall from the mouths of the Host and the Shipman, no trait of satire directed against this pure and venerable character is observable.

There are few of Chaucer's characters exhibited in Shakspeare's dramas, which are not also to be found, under one form or other, in Jonson's comedies. The Host*, however, belongs only to Chaucer and Shakspeare; but the class of national characters most variously depicted by the latter poet, and very sparingly by Jonson or Chaucer, are the domestic or household servants, including the domestic clown or fool. On this class of Shakspeare's comic characters a little volume might be written, of which I can here offer only, as it were, the heads of the chapters.

In every one of the few dramas of the later Greek comedy which have been transmitted to us

* The Host of the New Inn can scarcely be considered a genuine example of this character, since the person who engages in the duties of an innkeeper (Lord Frampul) belongs by birth and education to a totally distinct class in life.—New Inn, act i. sc. i.; Gifford's Jonson, vol. v. p. 335. Jonson, in this play, both cites and parodies Chaucer. The following line is quoted from the friar's character:—

"To make [their] English sweet upon [their] tongue,
as reverend Chaucer says."—Act i. sc. i. And Act ii. sc. ii.,

"After the school of Stratford o' the Bow,
For Lillie's Latin is to him unknown."

in the versions of Terence and Plautus, the domestic slave is one and the same character;—a shrewd cunning knave, who is actuated by no one principle but that of serving, with a view to his own interest, a young and libertine or spendthrift master, in opposition to the designs and wishes of a fond and anxious parent. In Chaucer we have but one well-defined instance of the domestic servant, namely, the Chanon's Yeoman; who, notwithstanding the menaces of his master, gives way to a vice very common amongst menials, that of ridiculing those who protect and maintain them. The Knight's Yeoman is not sufficiently characterised in the general prologue, to afford any insight into his character as an attendant; nor does he relate any tale. In Jonson's comedies, with the exception of the Proteus-like Brainworm, there is scarcely any example of this class which makes a lasting impression upon the reader's mind. In Shakspeare's domestic menials and clowns, we find every possible variety of qualities, intellectual as well as moral; from the devoted Adam to the time-serving Launcelot; from the shrewd and active Davy * to that

* The adroitness with which Davy takes advantage of the arrival of the man-of-war, and the consequent anxiety of his master to entertain

most diverting and naïf of fools, Simple. In the household of Olivia*, amidst some of the most humorous and comic passages, in the scenes between Portia and Nerissa, and in the character of Jessica, we discover many genuine traits of the domestics of Shakspeare's age. But the establishment of Shallow, consisting, with the exception of William Cook, of one single serving-man, is the most diverting of all. The perfect footing of equality and companionship established between Shallow and Davy, marks the meanness of the master's intellect; as the several "good uses" and capacities in which the serving-man is employed, shows his parsimony. But, perhaps, many a country justice of Shakspeare's age was fain to content himself with a single factotum, at once clerk to the magistrate, bailiff to the squire, and companion to the man. In this latter capacity the serving-man, in an inconsiderable family, often supplied the place of the professed fool and jester in the king's palace, or the castle of the nobleman of wealth

him, is one of the most natural and diverting of Shakspeare's bye-scenes.—Second part Henry IV. act v. sc. 1.

* Malvolio, Maria, Fabian, and the Clown.

and high rank; and of this kind of menial, instances occur in Shakspeare; they were generally rustics of shrewd natural wit, and, like the king's jesters, treated their masters with a privileged familiarity. The latter class *, as in the case of John Heywood, jester to Henry the Eighth, were frequently men of considerable parts and attainments.

Besides the domestic clowns and fools of Shakspeare, his plays exhibit a great variety of country rustics, often not less humorous wits, or deeper moralists, than the professed jesters. The most conspicuous instance of this class of characters is afforded in the grave-diggers in Hamlet. These characters are usually, if not always, of the poet's invention; and it is remarkable, that, in "As you Like It," while the characters and incidents are otherwise borrowed † from Lodge's "Rosalind," Touchstone is added by the poet himself.

* Perhaps the court jester was a distinct person from the fool. Henry the Eighth had a favourite fool, called "Will Somers."—Douce's Illust. of Shakspeare, vol. ii. p. 325. Charles the First was our last monarch who entertained a professional fool, called "Muckle John."—Ibid. p. 308. Killigrew, as a witty companion, supplied the place of a salaried jester to Charles the Second.

† With the exception of Jaques.

The comic characters of Chaucer, and, for the most part, those of Shakspeare, are drawn from country life; while those of Jonson, with few exceptions, belong to the metropolis or its immediate neighbourhood. How much of Chaucer's life may have been passed in the country, it is very difficult to ascertain; but his works seem to show an almost equally divided knowledge of every class and condition of his contemporaries. The early life of Shakspeare is a subject of inquiry almost equally dark; but there can exist little doubt that it was chiefly passed in the country; while Jonson was born, and, with the exception of his military services in Flanders, and his visit to Scotland in 1617, lived in the heart of London itself. But the chief difference between the national characters of Chaucer and Shakspeare, and those of Jonson, consists not so much in the source from whence they are derived, as in the spirit, as well as the art, with which they are drawn. That individuality and entireness which strongly marks out the characters of the two former poets, is, in many cases *, but feebly defined by Jon-

* The characters of Bobadill and of the jealous Kitely, in "Every

son; and in "Every Man out of his Humour," the *dramatis personæ* are but personifications of the sordid, vain, or vicious habits of his age. Neither have his characters any redeeming qualities *. In the Alchemist, for instance, his most approved work, Subtle and Face are a pair of the most unqualified monsters and colleagues in villany. The Somnour and Pardoner, indeed, of Chaucer are not very amiable personages; but, with these two exceptions, there is scarcely any one of the Canterbury Pilgrims who does not win our affections, or blind our judgments, by some spark of the wit of Falstaff, the honest blunt vanity of Shallow, or the naïve simplicity of Slender. Chaucer and

Man in his Humour," and those of the "Alchemist" generally, are probably the most exempt from this fault. The character also of Cob, the water-carrier, in the former play, is well drawn.

* It might be supposed, from the variety of low and vile characters with which Jonson's comic plays abound, that the dramatist was fond of low society; but nothing is more illogical than inferring the real habits of the man from the poetry of the author. Chaucer was a courtier during the greater part of his life; yet his characters are, for the most part, drawn from middle and low life. Jonson, besides enjoying the society of the wits of the Mermaid, (where a literary club, including Shakspeare, Fletcher, Beaumont, and others, had been established by Sir Walter Raleigh,) was honoured with the friendship of Camden, Selden, and Cecil; yet his national characters are derived from the middle aisle of Paul's, or the low resort of a fair.

Shakspeare paint the follies and vices of their age in the spirit of Horace, and force us to laugh even at grave and serious faults; Jonson, like Juvenal, endues even trivial failings with a black and gloomy colouring.

If we would behold the poetical character of Jonson in its most pleasing aspect, we must turn from his comedies to the lyric poetry, with which his masques are no less agreeably varied and enlivened, than are the magical tales of Shakspeare by similar ornaments. Amongst the numerous proofs of the poetry of Jonson's mind which his various works afford, might be cited, the opening lines of that exquisite fragment of a rural or pastoral drama, entitled "The Sad Shepherd." Eglamour, the shepherd, in search of his mistress, Earine, thus soliloquises:—

> Here she was wont to go! and here, and here!
> Just where those daisies, pinks, and violets grow:
> The world may find the Spring by following her;
> For other print her airy steps ne'er left.
> Her treading would not bend a blade of grass,
> Or shake the downy blow-ball from his stalk;
> But like the soft west wind she shot along,
> And where she went the flowers took thickest root.

Playhouses and Players.

Some idea of the engrossing interest of dramatic compositions in this age may be derived from the fact, that between the years 1579 and 1629*, no less than seventeen theatres had been built in London. The principal theatres in the age of Shakspeare, and those in which his own plays were most frequently represented, were that at Blackfriars, and the Globe on the Bankside, in Southwark. The latter was open to the sky, and therefore used only in summer; and it differed also from the Blackfriars theatre in being larger and more public to all classes. It does not appear that any theatre was ever honoured by the presence of royalty, and probably not by the higher ranks of the nobility. Masques were the favourite theatrical diversions of the court, and other dramas were acted, either in the palace, or in the mansions of the higher class of nobility, by private companies of retainers, regularly licensed for that purpose; the theatres were, however, the usual resort of the upper ranks of the gentry. Decker,

* Dodsley's Preface, p. lvi. Perhaps the most ancient theatres, "The Theatre" and "The Curtain," date as early as 1570.—Collier's New Facts, p. 7.

in his Gull's Horn-Book, one of the most curious records of the manners of this age, gives the following advice to the gallant, or aspiring man of fashion, as to the choice of a seat in the playhouse :—

" Whither, therefore, the gatherers of the public or private playhouse * stand to receive the afternoon's rent, let our gallant, having paid it, presently advance himself up to the throne of the stage ;—I mean, not into the lord's room †, which is now but the stage's suburbs,—no ; those boxes, by the iniquity of custom, conspiracy of waiting-women, and gentlemen ushers, that there sweat together, and the covetousness of sharers, are contemptibly thrust into the rear, and much new satin is damned by being smothered to death in darkness ; but on the very rushes where the

* The Blackfriars theatre was called a private, the Globe a public, theatre ; but the only known distinctions between the two kinds, except those already mentioned, were, that in the former the representations were by candlelight ; in the latter, by daylight ; and this was a mere consequence of the different times of the year in which the two sorts of theatres were employed.

† The price paid for a seat in the best rooms or boxes was a shilling.—Sir T. Overbury's Characters. The same price admitted the gallant to the highest class of ordinaries.—Decker's Gull's Horn-Book, ch. v.

comedy is to dance, and under the state of Cambyses himself *, must our feathered ostrich, like a piece of ordnance, be planted valiantly, because impudently beating down the opposed rascality.

"For do but cast up a reckoning:—what large comings-in are pursed up by sitting on the stage! First, a conspicuous eminence is gotten; by which means the best and most essential parts of a gallant, good clothes, a proportionable leg, white hand, the Persian lock, and a tolerable beard, are perfectly revealed †."

Besides the Globe, where Shakspeare's plays were acted in summer, there were several other theatres on the Bankside, such as the Swan, the Rose, and the Hope; all of which, as well as the Paris and other bear-gardens, nearly in the same situation, were the favourite resorts of the middle

* "Cambyses," a bombastic play by Thomas Preston, 1570. Falstaff, when about to personate King Henry, (1st part Henry IV. act ii. sc. iv.,) says, "I must speak in a passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses' vein." Marlowe's Tamburlane, 1592 (see Hall's Satires, book i. sat. iii.), and a play called "Jeronymo," were also the subject of constant ridicule, from the same defect of a turgid and inflated style. Bottom (Midsummer Night's Dream, act i. sc. ii.) speaks of "Ercles' vein:"—"I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split."

† Gull's Horn-Book, ch. vi.

and lower classes of society. As these places of amusement could be reached only by water, the establishment of theatres in the more immediate neighbourhood of the city was viewed with jealousy by the watermen, who gained their livelihood by conveying gallants and citizens to the Bankside theatres. The celebrated John Taylor, the "king's water-poet," as well as the "queen's water-man," presented a petition to King James, with a view of obtaining a prohibition of all playhouses not situated in his favourite quarter. The different companies of players prepared to oppose him, but the commission to which the dispute was referred (one of whom was Sir Francis Bacon) was dissolved before it came to a hearing.

In the age of Shakspeare, the companies of players were numerous in proportion to the theatres; they had, however, difficulties to contend with, partly owing to their own indiscretions in representing indecent or scurrilous pieces, which caused them to be occasionally prohibited *, partly owing to the rivalry of the children of Paul's, or of the Chapel, who still maintained their ground

* Stowe, apud Dodsley's Preface, p. lxiii.

against the new companies *. The most celebrated company of players in this age, was that to which Shakspeare, Fletcher, Hemings, Condel, and Burbage belonged. Hemings and Condel are well known as the earliest editors of Shakspeare's works, in folio; and Burbage, the most popular tragic actor of his day, is distinguished as the original Richard the Third. Besides these, Dick Tarleton † and Will Kempe were the most celebrated in the part of clowns; and, the former at least, occasionally entertained the audience with extempore sallies of wit. Actresses, in these days, there were none, after the fashion of the ancient theatrical companies, or at least those of the

* Hamlet, act ii. sc. ii.

† Lest the reader should think I am too familiar with these celebrated characters, I must remind him, that every one speaks of *Ben Jonson*, and many of *Kit Marlowe*, without intending the least disrespect to these distinguished dramatists. Indeed, if we kept to the phraseology of the time, we should say *Will Shakspeare*.—See Collier's Hist. of the Stage, vol. iii. 401. Tarleton and Kempe were courted by the highest classes. "He is not counted a gentleman (says the author of the 'Return from Parnassus †') who knows not Dick Burbage and Will Kempe;" and in Hall's Satires, "to sit with Tarleton on an ale-post sign," *i. e.* to be painted together with Tarleton on the sign of an inn, is mentioned as a covetable distinction.

† An anonymous play, acted in 1606 by the students of St. John's College, Cambridge.

Greeks, though, perhaps, amongst the Romans an occasional instance of a celebrated actress may be detected. The female parts were performed, in the days of Shakspeare, by boys *.

With some few notable exceptions, the dramatic authors and actors of this age (usually the same persons) were a dissolute and degraded class; nor was it without just cause that the Puritans, who, in their turn, were a butt for the satire and wit of the comedians and comic writers, directed their satires against the stage. In 1585 was published Stubbes' "Anatomie of Abuses," a portion of which contains an invective against "stage playes and enterludes, with their wickednesse." And in 1633, Prynne, who, to adopt the converse of a just and elegant expression in the "Retrospective Review," may be called the Stubbes of his day, put forth his well-known "Histriomastix."

* Decker's Gull's Horn-book, ch. vi. Flute, in the Midsummer Night's Dream, says, "Nay faith, let me not play a woman, I have a beard coming."

PART II.

SATIRE—POETRY OF WARNER, DANIEL, AND DRAYTON—CONCLUSION.

The most extensive and important department of English literature in what may, with some laxity of expression, be called the Elizabethan period, is the drama. By the drama, the age of Shakspeare is chiefly distinguished, not only from all preceding periods, but also, though less decisively, from all subsequent times. In this respect, the parallel, which in a former essay* I attempted to draw between the histories of Greek and English literature, still subsists. The ante-Homeric age in Greece, corresponds, in its didactic spirit, to that which preceded Chaucer in England. Chaucer himself, as the first to quit the paths marked out by the priestly and monkish rhymers, may be regarded as our English Homer. Then follows in each case, a wide waste, desolated by wars and

* Page 33 of this volume.

political disturbances; and these unfruitful times are succeeded, in both countries, by an age brilliant in many other respects, but chiefly distinguished by dramatic literature. In England, the literary character of this age, is also marked by satire, verse, as well as prose (which as a distinct branch of composition, had not hitherto appeared)—by the birth of a new and improved moral philosophy (in which the parallel with Athens still holds good) —by a critical spirit of antiquarian and historical research hitherto unknown—and by an advancement in the minor, though not unimportant department, of verbal criticism. The picture is a varied one; but if we were to search for a single character which, together with Shakspeare, should stand out in the boldest relief from the several groups which fill the canvass, our choice would necessarily fall upon Bacon. If Shakspeare, from the boldness of his metaphors, and from his employment of supernatural agency, either in palliating or adding mystery to the blackest crimes, may be called the Æschylus of his day, Bacon, as giving a new direction to philosophy, may be compared to the great master of Plato, and of Xeno-

phon, who first diverted the human mind from the mysteries of cosmogony to its proper study, the moral nature of man.

But Bacon and Shakspeare belong rather to all times and ages, than to the precise period now under our review: not only in thoughts, but even in language, they far outstep their contemporaries. In directing, therefore, the attention of the reader to humbler and more trifling themes, I do so, not with any idea of their absolute importance, but because relatively, and with regard to the age in question, they more distinctly mark out the general spirit and character of the times. The philosophy of Bacon, as also the theology of Hooker, are matters for a treatise of a graver and more important character, than belongs to an elementary essay: I shall, therefore, proceed to some notice of that department of Elizabethan literature, which, amongst subjects of a secondary importance, may be said to rank next to the drama, namely, the department of satire.

In Greek literature, as has been already observed, comedy was the chief vehicle of satire; with the Roman poets satire, properly so called, first origi-

nated. Amongst our own versifiers and poets, although satire forms the basis and the chief ingredient in the Vision of William, in the Ploughman's Crede, in the Canterbury Tales, and in the Shippe of Fooles, yet metrical satire on the model of Horace and Juvenal, does not appear in England before the days of Marston and Bishop Hall. In Italy these authors had been preceded by Ariosto, whose satires, although they enter largely into the follies and vices of society, especially those of the courtly and clerical classes, seem to have been provoked rather by personal affronts, than by the indignant feelings which prompt a poet to inveigh against the crimes or absurdities of his contemporaries. But the feature by which the satires of Ariosto seem most characteristically distinguished from those of our two English authors, is, the appendage which usually occurs of a humorous tale, aptly arising out of the subject.

In their own age, Hall and* Marston may have

* Dr. Donne, whose satires have been versified by Pope, although occasionally an equally graphic pourtrayer of manners, as a poet is not to be compared either to Marston or Hall.

been rivals in poetical reputation; they were equally agreeable to the wits of the times, equally the object of censure and disgust to the Puritans—and both, probably, were included in the general invective directed by Stubbes against "Hethnical pamphlets of toyes and bableries invented and excogitat by Beelzebub, written by Lucifer, licenced by Pluto, printed by Cerberus, and set abroach to sale by the infernal furies themselves, to the poisoning of the whole world*." But in the present day, those who are neither infected on the one hand by the hypocritical and all-condemning spirit of the Precisians, nor on the other with a licentious and prurient taste, (not less prevalent, it is to be feared, in the age of Shakspeare, than in that of Chaucer) will turn with pleasure from the not unfrequently low and impure satires of Marston, to the chaster pages of Hall. The easy flow of Hall's versification is superior, not only to that of the author of the "Scourge of Villainie," but to that of any English poet previous to the age of Waller, Dryden, or Pope†.

* Anatomie of Abuses, towards the conclusion.

† The first series of Hall's Satires appeared in 1597, the last three books

Hall was evidently a critical admirer of Horace and Juvenal; with much of the grave didactic spirit of the latter, he occasionally exhibits the light comic vein of the elder Roman satirist; and this, without the indecency or grossness of either. The following portrait of a gallant, who, after having exhausted his treasury by entertaining his friends, was reduced to a misfortune not uncommon with the gay sparks of this age, affords a lively comment on Jonson's scene in the middle aisle of Paul's, or on the sixth chapter of Decker's Gull's Horn-book.

Seest thou how gaily my young master goes,
Vaunting himself upon his rising toes;
And pranks his hand upon his dagger's side,
And picks his glutted teeth since late noon-tide.
'Tis Ruffio: Trow'st thou where he dined to-day?
In sooth I saw him sit with Duke* Humphray.

in 1598. He was appointed to the see of Exeter in 1627, and afterwards translated to Norwich. During the political troubles of Charles the First's reign, he suffered much annoyance from the Puritans. His "Meditations," a work more suitable to his later life, and to his episcopal character, is that probably by which he is known to most readers.

* Amongst the loungers in Paul's walk, many resorted there with the hope of being invited to dinner, in failure of which they were said to dine with Duke Humphrey; *i. e.* to remain in the aisle gazing at a tomb, falsely imagined to be that of the good duke, who, in fact, had been buried in St. Alban's Abbey.

Many good welcomes, and much gratis cheer
Keeps he for every straggling cavalier.
And open house, haunted with great resort
Long service mixed with musical disport *.
Many fair younker with a feathered crest,
Chooses much rather to be his shot-free guest,
To fare so freely with so little cost,
Than stake his twelvepence on a meaner host.
Hadst thou not told me, I should surely say
He touched no meat of all this live-long day.
For sure methought, yet that was but a guess,
His eyes seem'd sunk for very hollowness,
Yet for all that how stiffly he struts by,
All trapped in the new-found bravery †.

Hall's satire is directed in a great measure against

* The custom of enlivening the repast with music, now disused except by royalty, was in this age common to the middle classes of society. We learn from "The pleasant historie of Thomas of Reading," published about thirty years after Hall's satires, that this luxury was enjoyed by wealthy clothiers. Thomas Cole, the Reading clothier, whose piteous murder at Colebrook is portended by prodigies no less awful than those which foretold the death of Julius Cæsar, could not "digest his meat without music." The scene of the story is laid in the reign of Henry the First; but the novelist, not being so deep an antiquarian as Walter Scott, has given us an amusing picture of the manners of his own age. That the same custom was common at inns, we learn from Fynes Moryson. "While he, the traveller (or passenger, as he is called by Moryson) eats, if he have company especially, he shall be offered musicke, which he may freely take or refuse; and if he be solitary, the musitians will give him good day with musicke in the morning."—Moryson's Itinerary, part iii. p. 151.

† Hall's Satires, book iii. sat. vii.

the defects of the literature of the age. This topic is often treated in scattered passages of Horace and Juvenal; but I do not remember any author previous to Hall, who composes whole poems on this subject. In after ages, conspicuous instances of satire on literature are afforded, in Dryden's Mac Flecnoe, Pope's Dunciad, and Matthias' Pursuits of Literature. But these satires are rather personal, and directed against particular authors, than, as those of Hall, against the literature of the age generally. The wit of Hall is levelled against the ribaldry and bombast of the* stage, the puritanical† and religious poetry of the Precisians; and the extravagance of romantic and legendary poems. Spenser alone is excepted, from the general censure bestowed on the latter class of authors. Spenser was the only great poet contemporary with Hall, whose reputation, at the time his satires were published, was established.

It does not however appear, that either the "Byting‡" or the "Toothless Satyres" of Hall,

* Book i. sat. iii. † Book i. sat. viii.

‡ The first series of these satires appeared under the title of Toothless Satires, the last under that of Byting Satyres.

had any immediate influence in discouraging those legendary rhymes which, beginning in previous ages with Robert of Gloucester, and Robert Brunne, had afterwards formed the main staple of the poetry of Lidgate, and of the authors of the Mirror for Magistrates. Warner, a contemporary with Hall, follows in the same track. Of Warner's Albion's England I can only say, that I have never met with any passage of this work more worthy of being cited as poetry, than the pastoral episode* of Curran and Argentile. Drayton and Daniel, although, in a general review of their characters as poets, scarcely to be compared, unite, at least, on the choice of their historical themes. "The Civil Wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster," by Samuel Daniel, and "The Barons' Wars," by Drayton, comprehend nearly the same range in our national history.

Daniel is thus characterised by Edmund Bolton, who wrote a criticism on poets previous to 1600. "The works of Samuel Daniel are somewhat a flat,

* See Campbell's Specimens of British Poets, vol. ii. p. 273, or Muses' Library, p. 157.

but yet withal a very pure and copious English, and words as warrantable as any man's, and fitter perhaps for prose than measure." Critics of the present day will probably not be much inclined to question the justice of this opinion of Daniel's poetical powers. Drayton, although on the whole he displays less solid sense, has infinitely more of the fancy and genius of a poet. Superior in these respects to Daniel as regards his historical poetry, he is yet more worthy of praise in passages of his Polyolbion, and throughout the spirited and humorous Nymphidia. In choice of subjects Drayton was, with the exception of the latter instance, and some few other minor poems, peculiarly injudicious. On the one hand, he has fallen into the error of Lucan, in selecting topics from a period of history so nearly approaching his own times, that the imagination of the poet was fettered by the learning of the historian; on the other hand, he has chained his muse to the map; and if there is any one circumstance more than another which impresses us with the poetry of Drayton's genius, it is the spirited playfulness which he still exerts when under such confinement. The pictu-

resque descriptions and romantic allusions profusely scattered through the pages of the Polyolbion, will be sufficient to repay the reader for the tedium to which a chorographical description of England, in Alexandrine metre, will occasionally subject him. But the poem by which Drayton has most endeared himself to the admirers of English literature, is his "Nymphidia, or Court of Fairy." Fairies are usually treated by our poets with great levity: Chaucer* and Shakspeare introduce them into their most ludicrous and comic scenes. The Nymphidia of Drayton may be called the farce of fairy mythology; and the professed object of the poet, in relating the intrigues of Pigwiggen with Queen Mab, and the consequent fierce encounter between Oberon and the diminutive Fairy Knight, is to expose and satirize the prevailing vices and follies of the court. Drayton would have us to understand that in so doing, he treads on a new and unvisited field †; and certainly, as far as the in-

* Chaucer, especially in the Merchant's Tale.

† Then since no muse hath been so bold,
Or of the later, or the ould
Those Elvish secrets to unfold,
Which lye from others' reeding;

cidents of this humorous poem are concerned, he has every claim to originality; but it cannot fail to strike every one who reads the Nymphidia, that the imagery, in many even of its particulars, is borrowed* from Shakspeare.

The preceding review of English poetry in the age of Shakspeare, will be sufficient merely to recall to the reader's recollection some of the most prominent features of a subject, to illustrate which fully, would require a volume. The circumstance, indeed, by which the poetry of this period is most distinguished from that of preceding ages, is variety of subject. In the earliest stage of our vernacular literature, poetry was exclusively in the hands of the clergy, who solaced the retirement of a secluded monastery, by composing legendary rhymes, or moral and religious allegories. To

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My active Muse to light shall bring,
The court of the proud Fayry King,
And tell there, of the revelling:
Ione prosper my proceeding.

* It was at one time a question in the mind of Tyrwhitt, whether the date of the Nymphidia was prior to that of the Midsummer Night's Dream; but his decision in favour of the priority of the latter was determined by observing that Don Quixote, which did not make its appearance till five years after Shakspeare's drama, is cited in Drayton's poem.—Cant. Tales, vol. ii. p. 449, quarto edit.

these subjects succeeded the short-lived and fantastical poetry, founded on the practices of the May Games *, the Floral Societies, or the Courts of Love. Based on the usages of a particular period, rather than on themes interesting to mankind in general, these topics needed all the genius of Chaucer, or the learning of Gower, to support them. At this period, also, the Gesta Romanorum, and the earliest works of the Italian novelists, introduced into England a species of poetry peculiar to the age of Chaucer, first exemplified in the Handlyng of Sinne, by Robert Brunne, improved upon in the Confessio Amantis of Gower, and brought to perfection in the Canterbury Tales of Chaucer. After the death of the two latter poets, the Muses retreated upon the ancient field of historical legends, or allegorical visions; the latter works partaking, as they had done from the first, in various degrees, of a comic or satiric character. The concluding years of Elizabeth's reign open to us a new scene;—allego-

* Hence that constant allusion to May mornings, songs of birds, and beauties of flowers in Dunbar, and the old Scottish poets generally, from the too frequent introduction of which Chaucer himself is by no means free, and of which he first set the example.

ries (of which class of poems the Fairy Queene, with the exception of Thomson's professed imitation, affords the last illustrious instance) and visions, were altogether discontinued; and historical legends, although they frequently formed the basis of the serious drama, ceased to exist as a distinct branch of poetry. With Spenser, the genuine romantic school of English poetry, exclusive of imitations, expires.

The principal cause of this change of themes, and of this variety, in English poetry, must be sought for in the new sources opened to the nation by translations, as well from Italian as from ancient classic literature. By translations, and by the art of printing, which diffused these translations, a new region of fiction was discovered to all educated classes; and all whose genius directed them to the pursuits of poetry, revelled in the new-found treasures. Warner, Daniel, and occasionally even Drayton, follow in the old legendary track: but the master-spirits of the age, and more especially Shakspeare, drew principally from the new sources. Jonson, perhaps, affords a solitary instance, amongst the poets of this period, of one

to whom the facilities afforded by translations from Greek and Latin authors were needless; whole passages may frequently be found in his dramatic works, translated literally from the obscurer classics, which in his day had not yet appeared in an English dress.

When we look back upon this brilliant period of English literature,—an age which, in fertility, may be compared to that of Pericles at Athens, or of Lorenzo at Florence,—we may be tempted to inquire what advance the nation has since made, or what accessions have been added to the rich fund which then accrued to England. If we direct our attention to the department of poetry alone, we must confess, that in majesty of thought, the Elizabethan poets have been surpassed in one solitary instance only; but in delicacy of sentiment, and freedom from all ribaldry and indecency; in polish, though not perhaps vigour of language; and in harmony of versification, what comparison will the older poets bear with those of the past or present age? Add to this, that the landscape scenes of modern poetry, are, beyond comparison, more true, more rich, and more

various than those of their mediæval predecessors. Every schoolboy might point to passages of the Seasons, or of The Task, which would illustrate this statement; and from these he might turn, for sublimity, to the alpine scenery of Manfred; for vivacity and lively touches, to the Highland glens and mountains of the Lady of the Lake; or, for simplicity and its attendant, true poetry, to The Excursion.

These qualities, in which the modern school of poetry has indisputably surpassed the more ancient, are, it will be said, but the minor graces and embellishments of the art; the dress rather than the graceful figure itself; the Dutch school of painting compared to the Roman. This degeneracy, if it must be so called, has been the constant attendant of art in refined ages, but more especially, perhaps, of poetry. Poetry is the natural growth of a rude and uncultivated soil; and in that soil, unfettered by the mechanical difficulties of sculpture or painting, it soon springs to maturity. In an age entirely destitute of letters, poetry is of necessity the only literature. Metre is required to aid the memory; and even

metaphors, which, in after ages, are the work of art and design, are at first adopted from poverty of language. There is a youth also, and youthful feelings, in nations, as well as in individuals. In rude ages, the mind is unoccupied by more serious pursuits; the heart is not yet rendered callous by the vices, the follies, and intrigues of over-grown cities; and the pastoral, roving, or adventurous life of enterprise in which infant nations are engaged, at once supplies themes for the bard, and disposes the minds of his audience to a rapturous admiration of his song. Hence that truth and simplicity, natural only to a rude period, but affected, and therefore displeasing, in an age of comparative refinement. Hence the impracticability, either of imitating or translating the sublimity of Homer, or of modernising the simple diction of Chaucer. Poetry, in short, in order to progress, must be born again.

What, then, are the characteristics by which the literature of the present age is most advantageously distinguished from that of almost all preceding periods? Next to a purer tone of morals, the foremost of all advantages, must be

reckoned that critical and antiquarian spirit in historical research, which we recognise but indistinctly, and only in some rare instances, amongst ancient classic authors; and which, in our country, does not appear before the days of Leland, scarcely before those of Camden, Selden, and Dugdale. This laborious exactness, fostered as it has been, as well by religious controversy as by the study of physical science, can only be rendered available, through the facilities afforded to us, towards the preservation and inspection of ancient documents, by the art of printing.

Wherever we cast our thoughts abroad, and into whatever train of ideas we may fall, in comparing the present with the past intellectual condition of the world, to this powerfully effective art, and to its consequences, by one channel or another, we must inevitably revert; and, indeed, if there is one circumstance more than any other, in which the literature of the present age displays an undoubted pre-eminence over that of every preceding period, it is not, generally speaking, so much in the advancement, as in the diffusion, of knowledge. It would seem decreed, as if by an overruling Providence,

that the treasures, which in past ages were within the reach only of the wealthy or the learned, should be generally, though gradually, imparted to all classes of society. That such, at least, is the inevitable tendency of the facilities now afforded to all ranks, both of obtaining books and of receiving instruction, must be admitted by all, who do not perceive dark clouds gathering from some unknown and undefined quarter in our apparently bright horizon; or who do not view, in prospect, the incursion of barbarians from some southern or western hive.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

SPECIMENS OF CHAUCER'S POETRY.

FROM THE MAN OF LAWE'S TALE.

CUSTANCE having been married to Alla, king of Northumberland, through the treachery of Donigeld, the king's mother, is banished, and set adrift on the ocean in a rudderless ship. Her behaviour on her departure is thus described :

Wepen both yong and old in al that place,
Whan that the king this cursed lettre sent :
And Custance, with a dedly palé face,
The fourthé day toward the ship she went :
But natheless she taketh in good intent
The will of Crist, and kneeling on the stronde
She sayde, "Lord, ay welcome be thy sonde *.

* Behest; literally, message.

He that me kepté fro the falsé blame,
While I was in the lond amonges you,
He can me kepe fro harme, and eke fro shame,
In the salt see, although I see not how;
As strong as ever he was, he is yet now:
In him trust I, and in his mother dere,
That is to me my sail, and eke my stere *."

Hire litel child lay weping in hire arm,
And, kneling pitously, to him she said:
"Pees, litel sone; I wol do thee no harm."
With that hire couverchief of hire head she braid,
And over his litel eyen she it laid;
And in hire arme she lulleth it ful fast,
And into the heven hire eyen up she cast.

"Mother," quod she, "and mayden bright Marie,
Soth is, that thurgh womanne's eggement †
Mankind was borne, and damned ay to die;
For which thy child was on a cross yrent:
Thy blisful eyen saw all his turment,
Than is ther no comparison betwene
Thy wo, and any wo man may sustene.

"Thou saw thy child yslain before thin eyen,
And yet now liveth my litel child parfay:
Now, lady bright, to whom all woful crien—
Thou glory of womanhed! thou fairé May!
Rew on my child, that of thy gentillesse
Rewest on every rewful in distresse.

* Rudder. † Incitement.

"O litel child, alas! what is thy gilt,
That never wroughtest sinne as yet parde?
Why wol thy harde father have thee spilt?
O mercy, dere Constable! (quod she,)
As let my litel child dwell here with thee;
And if thou darst not saven him fro blame,
So kiss him ones in his fadres name."

Therwith she loketh backward to the lond,
And saide:—"Farewell, housbond routheless!"
And up she rist, and walketh down the strond
Toward the ship, hire foloweth all the prees*;
And ever she praieth hire child to hold his pees,
And taketh hire leve; and with an holy intent
She blesseth hire, and into the ship she went.

FROM THE DUTCHESSE.

THE poet falling asleep while reading the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, dreams that he is in a chamber splendidly ornamented with paintings describing scenes from Trojan story, and from the "Romaunt of the Rose;" he is roused from his repose by the notes of a huntsman's horn, and, joining the chase, is conducted

* Crowd.

to the woodland scene, in which he discovers the mourning knight, by a whelp which had strayed from the pack.

And as I lay, thus wonder loud
Me thought I heard a hunté blow
T'assay his great horne, and for to know
Whether it was clere, or horse of sowne.
And I heard going both up and downe
Men, horse, hounds, and other thing,
And all men speake of hunting,
How they would slee the hart with strength,
And how the hart had upon length
So much embosed, I n'ot now, what.
Anon right whan I hearde that,
How that they would on hunting gone,
I was right glad, and up anone
Tooke my horse, and forth I went
Out of my chamber, I never stent
Till I come to the field without,
There overtooke I a great rout
Of hunters and eke forresters,
And many relaies * and limers †,
And highed hem to the forrest fast,
And I with hem, so at the last
I asked one lad, a lymere
" Say, fellow, who shall hunte here ?"

* Fresh sets of hounds. † Bloodhounds.

(Quod I); and he answered agen,
"Sir, the Emperour Octavien,"
(Quod he,) "and is here fast by."
"A Godde halfe, in good time," (quod I,)
Go we fast, and gan to ride,
Whan we come to the forrest side,
Every man did right soone,
As to hunting fell to done.
The maister hunte, anone fote-hote *
With his horne blew three mote
At the uncoupling of his houndis;
Within a while the hart found is
Yhallowed, and rechased fast
Long time, and so at the last
This hart rouzed and stale away
Fro all the hounds a privie way.
The hounds had overshot him al,
And were upon a default yfal,
Therewith the hunté wonder fast
Blew a forloyn at the last;
I was go walked fro my tree
And as I went, there came by me
A whelpe, that fawned me as I stood,
That had yfollowed, and coud no good;
It came and crept to me as low,
Right as it haddé me yknow,

* In haste, with all expedition.

Held downe his head, and joyned his eares,
And laid all smoothe downe his heares.
I would have caught it anone,
It fled, and was fro me gone,
As I him followed, and it forth went
Downe by a floury grene it went,
Full thicke of grasse, full soft and sweet,
With floures fele *, faire under feet,
And little used, it seemed thus,
For both Flora, and Zepherus,
They two, that make floures grow,
Had made hir dwelling there I trow.
For it was on to behold,
As though the earth envye wold
To be gayer than the heven,
To have mo floures such seven,
As in the welkin sterres be,
It had forgot the poverte
That winter, through his cold morrowes,
Had made it suffer, and his sorrowes
All was forgeten, and that was seene,
For all the wood was waxen greene,
Sweetnesse of dewe had made it waxe.

* Many.

FROM THE TROILUS AND CRESSEIDE.

DESCRIPTION OF TROILUS RETURNING FROM BATTLE.

This Troilus sat on his baie stede
Al armed save his hed ful richely *,
And wounded was his horse, and gan to blede,
On which he rode † a pace ful softely:
But such a knightly sight truely
As was on him, was nat withouten faile
To loke on Mars, that god is of battaile.

So like a man of armes, and a knight
He was to seen, fulfilled of high prowesse,
For both he had a body and a might
To doen that thing, as well as hardinesse,
And eke to seen him in his gearé dresse
So freshe, so yong, so weldy ‡ seemed he,
It was a heven upon him for to see.

---

* This line occurs in a beautiful and well-known passage of the Squier's Tale, Cant. Tales, 10404. See infra.

This strange knight that come thus sodenly,
Al armed, save his hed, ful richely.

† A foot's pace. ‡ Active or powerful, literally able to welde or wield.

His helme to—hewen * was in twenty places,
That by a tissue hong his backe behind,
His shelde to—dashed with swerdes and with maces,
In which men might many an arrowe find,
That thirled † had both horn, nerfe, and rind:
And aie the people cried, "Here cometh our joie,
And next his brother, holder up of Troie."

The two following passages, though well known to every reader, are, in the several departments of serious and humorous description, amongst the most forcible in Chaucer's poetry:—

FROM THE KNIGHT'S TALE.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE ALLEGORICAL IMAGES WITH WHICH THE TEMPLE OF MARS WAS DECORATED.

First on the wall was peinted a forest
In which there wonneth neither man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hideous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough:

---

* Pandarus dwells so much on this point in Shakspeare's drama, that it would appear as if the expressions, however different the vein and spirit of the two passages, were derived from Chaucer.

† Pierced through.

And downward from an hill, under a bent,
Ther stood the temple of Mars omnipotent,
Wrought all of burned stele, of which th' entree
Was longe and streite, and gastly for to see.
And thereout came a rage, and swiche a vise *,
That it made all the gates for to rise.
The northern light in at the doré shone,
For window on the wall ne was ther none,
Thurgh which men mighten any light discerne.
The dore was all of athamant eterne,
Yclenched overthwart and endelong
With yren tough, and for to make it strong,
Every piler the temple to sustene
Was tonne-gret, of yren bright and shene.
Ther saw I first the derke imagining
Of felonie, and alle the compassing;
The cruel ire, red as any glede †,
The pike-purse, and eke the palé drede;
The smiler with the knif under his cloke,
The shepen brenning with the blaké smoke;
The treson of the mordring in the bedde,
The open werre, with woundes all bebledde;
Conteke ‡ with blody knif, and sharp manace.
All full of chirking was that sory place.
The sleer of himself yet saw I there,
His harte-blood hath bathed all his here;

* Violence. † Red-hot coal. ‡ Contention.

The naile ydriven in the shode* on hight,
The coldé deth, with mouth gaping upright.
Amiddes of the temple sate mischance,
With discomfort and sory contenance;
Yet saw I † woodnesse laughing in his rage,
Armed complaint, outhees ‡, and fiers outrage;
The carraine § in the bush, with throte ycorven,
A thousand slain, and not of qualme || ystorven;
The tirant, with the prey by force yraft;
The toun destroied, there was nothing laft.
Yet saw I brent the shippes hoppesteres ¶,
The hunte ystrangled with wilde beres;
The sow freting ** the child right in the cradel—
The coke yscalled, for all his long ladel.
Nought was foryete by th' infortune of marte,
The carter overridden with his carte;
Under the wheel ful low he lay adoun.

---

* Hair of a man's head. † Madness.

‡ Outcry. § Carrion.

|| Qualme, sickness; ystorven, dead.

¶ A hoppester, a dancer. Hoppestere, the feminine of hoppester. Shippes hoppesteres, the vessels dancing on the waves.

** Devouring.

FROM THE MILLER'S TALE.

PORTRAIT OF A PARISH CLERK.

Now was ther of that chirche a parish clerk,
The which that * was ycleped Absolon,
Crulle † was here, and as the gold it shon,
And strouted as a fanné large and brode;
Ful streight and even lay his joly shode.
His rode ‡ was red, his eyen grey as goos,
With Poules § windows carven on his shoos,
In hosen red he went ful fetisly.
Yclad he was ful smal and proprely ||
All in a kirtel of a light ¶ waget;
Ful faire and thicke ben the pointes set.
And thereupon he had a gay surplise,
As white as is the blosme upon the rise **.
A mery child he was, so God me save;
Wel coud he leten blod, and clippe, and shave,

* That is redundant; *which that*, the same as *which*.

† The same epithet, signifying curled, is applied to the "lockes of the yonge Squier."

‡ Complexion.

§ His shoes were ornamented with carvings, similar in shape to the windows of Paul's cathedral.

|| Proprement, neatly. Fetisly has nearly the same signification.

¶ Waget, perhaps a cloth manufactured at Watchet, in Somersetshire.—Tyrwhitt's note on line 3321. In the glossary, he explains it to mean, of a light blue colour.

** The blossom on the hawthorn.

And make a chartre of lond, and a quittance,
In twenty manere coud he trip and dance,
(After the schole of Oxenfordé tho)
And with his legges casten to and fro;
And playen songes on a smal ribible*;
Therto he song somtime a loud quinible†,
And as wel coud he play on a giterne.
In all the toun n'as brewhous ne taverne,
That he ne visited with his solas‡,
Ther§ as that any gaillard‖ tapstere was.

His courtship of Dame Alison is thus described:—

Fro day to day this joly Absolon
So loveth hire, that him is wo-begon.
He waketh all the night, and all the day,
He kembeth his lockes brode, and made him gay.
He woeth hire by menes¶ and brocage,
And swore he wolde ben hire owen page.
He singeth brokking** as a nightingale.
He sent hire pinnés, methe, and spiced ale,
And wafres piping hot out of the glede:
And for she was of toun, he profered mede.
Somtime to shew his lightnesse and maistrie,
He playeth Herode on a skaffold hie.

---

* A small rebec.

† Quinible is explained by Tyrwhitt as a kind of musical instrument.

‡ Solace, mirth.

§ Ther, constantly in Chaucer for where.

‖ Brisk, gay.

¶ Agents and treaties.

** Quavering.

FROM THE SOMPNOUR'S TALE.

THE FRAUDULENT PRACTICES OF A MENDICANT FRIAR.

And whan this frere had said all his entent,
With qui cum patre forth his way he went.
Whan folk in chirche had yeve him what hem lest,
He went his way, no longer wold he rest,
With scrippe and tipped staff, ytucked hie:
In every hous he gan to pore and prie,
And begged mele and chese, or elles corn.
His felaw had a staff tipped with horn,
A pair of tables all of ivory,
And a pointel * ypolished fetisly,
And wrote alway the namés, as he stood,
Of alle folk that gave hem any good,
Askaunce † that he wold for hem preye.
Yeve us a bushel whete, or malt, or reye,
A Goddes kichel ‡, or a trippe of chese,
Or elles what you list, we may not chese;

* A pointed style for writing.

† Askaunce is explained by Tyrwhitt (note on line 7327), *as if to say;* yet some of the instances cited would seem to warrant the interpretation of *asking.*

‡ A little cake, given by godfathers and godmothers to their godchildren when they asked a blessing.

A Goddes halpeny, or a masse peny;
Or yeve us of your braun, if ye have any,
A dagon * of your blanket, levé dame,
Our suster dere (lo here I write your name)
Bacon or beef, or swiche thing as ye find.
A sturdy harlot † went him ay behind,
That was his hostes man, and bare a sakke,
And what men yave hem, laid it on his bakke,
And whan that he was out at dore anon,
He planed away the names everich on,
That he before had written in his tables;
He served hem with nifles ‡ and with fables.

FROM THE NONNE'S PRIEST'S TALE.

A POURE widewe somdel stoupen in age,
Was whilom dwelling in a narwe cottage,
Beside a grove, stonding in a dale,
This widewe, which I tell you of my tale,
Sin thilke day that she was last a wif,
In patience led a ful simple lif.
For litel was hire catel and hire rente;
By husbondry of swiche as God hire sente,
She found hireself, and eke hire doughtren two.
Three large sowes had she, and no mo:

---

* A piece. † Varlet.
‡ Niffles, idle tales.

Three kine, and eke a shepe that highte malle.
Ful sooty was hire boure and eke hire halle,
In which she ete many a slender mele.
Of poignant sauce ne knew she never a dele.
No deintee morsel passed through hire throte;
Her diete was accordant to hire cote,
Repletion ne made hire never sike;
Attempre diete was all hire physike,
And exercise, and hertes suffisance.
The goute let hire nothing for to dance,
No apoplexie shente not hire hed.
No win ne dranke she neither white ne red;
Hire borde was served most with white and black,
* Milk and broun bred, in which she found no lack,
† Seinde bacon, and sometimes an ey ‡ or twey;
For she was, as it were, a maner dey §.
A yerd she had, enclosed all about
With stickes, and a drie diche without,
In which she had a cok highte chaunticlere,
In all the land of crowing n' as his pere.
His vois was merier than the mery orgon
On massé daies, that in the chirches gon.
Wel sikerer was his crowing in his loge
Than is a clok, or any abbey orloge.

---

* "The soup their only hawkie doth afford."—Burns' Cottar's Saturday Night.

† Seinde, besides. ‡ An egg.

§ Dey, the lowest class of labourers.

By nature he knew eche ascentioun
Of the equinoctial in thilke toun;
For whan degrees fiftene were ascended,
Than crew he that it might not ben amended.
His combe was redder than the fin corall,
Embattelled, as it were a castel wall.
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone;
Like azure were his legges and his tone*;
His nailes whiter than the lily flouer,
And like the burned gold was his colour.

Chaunticlere thus describes to Dame Pertelote the cause of his unquiet rest, and his ominous dream:—

† Me mette, how that I romed up and doun
Within our yerde, wher as I saw a beste,
Was like an hound, and wold han made areste
Upon my body, and han had me ded.
His colour was betwixt yelwe and red;
And tipped was his tail, and both his eres,
With black, unlike the remenant of his heres.
His snout was smal, with glowing eyen twey;
Yet for his loke almost for fere I dey:
This caused me my groning douteles.

The loving pair then enter into a long and learned discussion on the philosophy of dreams. Pertelote contends that

"Swevens engendren of repletions;"

* Toes. † I dreamed.

according to which doctrine, she recommends to her partner some appropriate remedy. Chanticlere, who, although of the more courageous sex, is a prey to disquietude fully equal to that of Eve in Paradise Lost, cites two piteous tales from Valerius Maximus, and a third from the life of St. Kenelme, to prove that dreams are intended as a warning of coming events. And to give yet greater weight to his arguments, he adduces the insuperable authority of Macrobius's Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis, besides numerous instances as well from sacred as profane history. The issue of the events proves the truth of his positions. It had been predestined that the Fox, who, since he had not yet assumed his French title of Reynard, is styled in this fable Dan Russel *, should equal, in treachery and dissimulation, Judas Iscariot, the Greek Sinon, or Ganelon by whom the chivalric army of Charlemagne was betrayed. The poet who, in this humorous tale, (a masterpiece in its kind) displays more learning than perhaps on any other occasion, compares the lamentation of the feathered seraglio to the wailing of the Grecian dames for the loss of Priam, to the grief of Hasdrubal's wife † for her husband's death, and

* From his red colour.

† The story may be found in the supplement to Livy, l. 51; but

to that of the Roman senators' wives, when Nero burnt the capital of the world. At length having exhausted his classical comparisons, he turns "unto his tale again," and in the description of the hue and cry raised after Dan Russel, affords us a choice specimen of his humorous and graphic powers.

The sely widewe*, and hire doughtren two,
Herden thise hennes crie and maken wo,
And out at the dores sterten they anon,
And saw the fox toward the wode is gon,
And bare upon his back the cok away:
They crieden out, "harow and wela wa!
A ha the fox!" and after him they ran,
And eke with staves many another man;
Ran Colle, our dogge, and Talbot, and Gerlond,
And Malkin, with hire distaf in hire hond;
Ran cow and calf, and eke the veray hogges,
So fered were for berking of the dogges,
And shouting of the men and women eke,
They ronnen so, hem thought hir hertes breke:
They yelleden as fendes don in helle;
The dokes crieden as men wold hem quelle†;
The gees for fere flewen over the trees,
Out of the hivé came the swarme of bees,

Chaucer's knowledge of it was probably derived from Tertullian, or some work in which Tertullian was quoted.

* Simple, innocent. † Kill.

So hideous was the noise, a benedicite!
Certes he, Jakke Straw, and his meinie *,
Ne maden never shoutes half so shrille,
Whan that they wolden any Fleming kille,
As thilke day was made upon the fox,
Of bras they broughten bemes † and of box,
Of horn and bone, in which they blew and pouped,
And therewithal they shriked as they houped ‡;
It seemed as that the heven shulde falle.

FROM THE SQUIER'S TALE.

THE unexpected arrival of the stranger knight at the court of Cambuscan, king of Tartary, during a feast held in celebration of the monarch's nativity:—

And so befell, that, after the thridde cours,
While that this king sit thus in his nobley §,
Herking his ministralles hir thinges play
Before him at his bord deliciously,
In at the halle dore al sodenly
Ther came a knight upon a stede of bras,
And in his hond a brod mirrour of glas;
Upon his thombe he had of gold a ring,
And by his side a naked swerd hanging;

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* The throng of his followers.
† Trumpets. ‡ Hooped or hollowed.
§ Dignity or splendour.

And up he rideth to the highe bord *.
In all the halle ne was ther spoke a word,
For mervaille of this knight; him to behold
Ful besily they walten, yong and old.
This strangé knight that come thus sodenly,
Al armed, save his hed, ful richely,
Saluеth king and quene, and lordes alle
By order, as they saten in the halle,
With so high reverence and observance,
As well in speche as in his contenance,
That Gawain, with his olde curtesie,
Though he were come agen out of fairie,
Ne coude him not amenden with a word.

The presents from the King of Arabie and Inde to Cambuscan having been exhibited, the astonishment and conjectures of the crowd thereupon is thus described:—

Gret was the prees that swarmed to and fro,
To gauren on this hors that stondeth so;
For it so high was, and so brod and long,
So wel proportioned for to be strong,
Right as it were a stede of Lumbardie:
Therwith so horsly, and so quick of eye,
As it a gentil Poleis† courser were;
For certes, fro his tayl unto his ere

* The dais, or raised table. Board continued the common term for a dinner-table in the age of Shakspeare: at Oxford the expression, "high table," is still used.

† A courser of Poile, the old French name for Apulia, the horses of which country were formerly celebrated.

Nature ne art ne coud him not amend
In no degree, as all the peple wend*.
But evermore hir moste wonder was
How it coude gon, and was of bras;
It was of faerie, as the peple semed.
Diverse folk diversely han demed;
As many heds, as many wittes ben.
They murmured as don a swarm of been,
And maden skilles after hir fantasies,
Rehersing of the olde poetries,
And sayd it was ylike the Pegasee,
The hors that hadde winges for to flee;
Or elles it was the Greekes' hors, Sinon,
That broughte Troye to destruction,
As men moun in thise olde gestes rede.
Min herte (quod on) is evermore in drede,
I trow, som men of armes ben therin,
That shapen hem this citee for to win:
It were right good that al swich thing were know.
† Another rowned to his felaw low,
And sayd, "He lieth; for it is rather like
An apparence ymade by som magike,
‡ As jogelours plaien at thise festes grete."
Of sondry doutes thus they jangle and trete,

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* Wene, conjecture.

† ——————Θάμβος δ' ἶχεν ἰσαρέοντας
Τρῶάς θ' ἱππόδαμους καὶ ἰϋκνημιδας Ἀχαιους
Ὧδε δι τις ιπτισιν, ἰδων ις πλήσιον ἀνδρων.—Il. Δ. 79.

‡ The attention of the reader has already been directed to the

As lewed peple demen comunly
Of thinges that ben made more subtilly
Than they can in hir lewednesse * comprehende,
They demen gladly to the badder ende.

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twenty-second chapter of Mandeville's Travels, which contains a curious illustration of the prevalence of this amusement among eastern monarchs.

* Ignorance.

THE END.

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